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ABSTRACT

A study examined adults' experiences regarding participation, guidance, and progression in various formal educational settings across Scotland. In-depth interviews were conducted with 50 adult returners to the different parts of the education system (higher, further, and community education and local schools). Data from the interviews were synthesized into a portrait of adults' reasons for participating in educational programs; their guidance needs, persistence in the system, gains, and progression; and policy implications. Most respondents returned to the education system to improve their positions in the labor market. The respondents expressed a need for three types of guidance (information, advice, and support) while choosing their courses and during and near the end of their courses. Although most respondents were already highly motivated to stay on course, they considered an encouraging and friendly staff to be the single most important factor in helping them stay on course. Among the reported gains due to participation were increased self-confidence and self-esteem, increased academic knowledge, and new friends and interests. (Fifty references and 10 suggestions for further reading are included along with a technical appendix, detailed description of the sample, respondent profiles, and list of advisory committee members.) (MN)

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Facing Goliath:

Adults' experiences of participation, guidance and progression in education

Amy Blair
Joanna McPake
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Amy Blair
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The Scottish Council for Research in Education

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Summary

The purpose of this study is to explore adults' experiences of participation, guidance and progression in a variety of formal educational settings across Scotland. The research represents a departure from previous statistical surveys: for this study, data was collected from 50 adult returners through the use of in-depth interviews. The study seeks to identify underlying causes and explanations for participation and progression.

This summary is intended to guide readers through the main themes and findings of the research. Whilst most themes are considered in discrete chapters, additional information may be found in the chapters delineated by parenthesis, below.

A description of the context of the research may be found in Chapter 1, while additional information about methodology and the sample may be found in the appendices.

Participation

Theme	*Findings*	*Location in report (chapters)*
Explaining participation	Adults return to education as a result of the interplay of two factors: the goals that they set for themselves and the circumstances in their lives.	2 (3, 4)
	The precise way in which these two factors interact differs from person to person and it is impossible to forecast individuals' participation through the use of typologies or predictive models.	
Goals	Adults reported a number of different goals, but most were returning in the hope that enhanced skills and qualifications would help them in the labour market.	3 (7)
	People with similar-sounding goals followed very different courses in different settings.	
	Goals tended to change during participation *from* being related to employment *to* progression within the education system.	
Life circumstances	Six key life circumstances affecting participation were identified; age, gender, family circumstances, employment status and previous educational experiences.	4
	The same life circumstances operate in different ways on individuals' decisions to return. There is no single solution to encouraging participation.	

Guidance

Guidance	The literature suggests that adults appreciate guidance at three stages of their return: while choosing their course; during their course; and towards the end of their course. We found this to be the case for our own sample.	5 (6, 7)
Types	Respondents sought three different types of guidance: information, advice and support.	5
Services	Few adults made use of formal guidance services. They were most likely to rely upon their own prior knowledge or that of relatives and friends.	5
	Adults were generally satisfied with the formal guidance they had received, but it was often difficult to find and limited in nature.	
	As a result of such limited knowledge, adults were often unaware of all the options open to them	5 (6, 7)
Information base	Adults' choices were limited by their narrow information base and by their personal circumstances. Nevertheless, respondents talked about the positive reasons for their choice of provider and form of provision. They often gave very similar reasons for their choices.	5 (4)
	In most cases adults chose a provider and then chose a course. Providers were chosen because they were within easy travelling distance of students' homes.	

Staying on course

Motivation	Adults were highly motivated to stay on their courses. The voluntary nature of participation as opposed to the compulsory nature of schooling was highlighted.	6
Informal support	Help from family and friends was important especially for childcare. Family were more likely to be supportive if they could see visible, beneficial results of participation. Return to education could sometimes strain family relationships.	6 (2)
Staff	The single thing which adults appreciated most in helping them stay on course was an encouraging and friendly staff.	6
Other factors	Efficient administration, timetabling and the provision of facilities such as childcare, library, quiet study areas and pleasant refectories were mentioned. Adults in further and higher education tended to be dissatisfied with the available facilities.	6

Gains and progression

Kinds of gain	Adults made many different gains from participation, and these were often varied and unexpected. Initial employment goals, for example, were often countered by unanticipated personal gains.	*7*
Increased interest in education	In most cases, the main outcome of these gains was a desire to progress to the next stage of education, despite the fact that this had not been an initial goal.	*7 (3)*
Main gains	Adults reported increased confidence in themselves, increased academic knowledge, new friends and interests and increased self esteem as main gains from participation.	*7*
Progression	Adults saw progression not only in terms of more advanced level courses. Staying at the same course level also counted as progression.	*7*

Policy implications

The following policy implications are drawn from the research findings. They are the opinions of the authors. The chapters in brackets indicate the evidence which suggested the policy implications.

Diversity of provision	The variety of purposes of participation and the range or circumstances affecting participation suggest that a wide range of provision needs to be sustained.	*8 (3, 4)*
Vocational courses	It is difficult to classify courses. Funding for them should not be determined by vocational/non-vocational labels.	*8 (3, 4)*
Importance of collaboration	Collaboration among providers should continue to be encouraged to promote progression and to sustain participation.	*8 (5, 7)*
Guidance	Client-led funding can raise questions about the impartiality of guidance. Co-ordinated guidance provision at regional level should be encouraged.	*8 (5, 6)*
Outreach work	Adults can be unaware of the range of educational opportunities in their local area. Outreach work, whereby institutions go out into their local communities should be encouraged.	*8 (5, 6)*

In order to do justice to the words and experiences of our respondents, we have included in the report extensive reference to their stories. We have also quoted them wherever possible. For the most part, these examples are provided as complements to the text, rather than as integral parts of it, and we have therefore set them apart in grey boxes in the outer margins of the pages. In Chapters 5, 6, and 7 some of the boxes perform a dual purpose by summarizing main points as well as furnishing thought-provoking excerpts from the transcripts.

All of the names used have been changed in order to protect their anonymity.

1 Setting the scene

Context of the research

On first inspection, adult education in Scotland appears to be thriving. Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI, 1992) recently commented that 'there is an abundance of learning opportunities for adults' (p 4) and that provision of such opportunities is increasingly flexible and diverse. The range of providers – from the informal and community-based Community Education Service to formal institutions such as schools and further and higher education institutions - is vast. Student numbers are also rising, as a survey carried out by the Association of University Teachers (AUT, 1989) has demonstrated: in the four years preceding the report, the number of adults enroled in Scottish schools rose from 5,000 to 14,000; the participation of post-18 year olds in SCOTVEC National Certificate courses increased by 92% and there was a 55% increase in mature entrants to university. Enrolment in part-time degree study increased by 128%.

On the other hand, viewed in terms of the statistics for the United Kingdom as a whole (reported in Sargant, 1991), these figures take on a different significance. While 13% of the respondent population in this survey said they were currently studying, only 6% of Scots reported they were doing so. Only 13% of Scots said they had studied at any time in the last three years, compared with 29% of the UK population overall. While 47% of the total sample reported that they would like to get involved in learning in the future, only 38% of Scots answered in this way. This rather depressing picture is reinforced by Munn and MacDonald (1988) who found that the majority of Scottish adults (58%) do not take up education or training opportunities after their participation in compulsory schooling; and that there has been little change in the participation of those groups who traditionally have not been involved in adult education - such as women with small children, the long-term unemployed, and those over the age of 45.

Thus, though the number of adults in Scotland who have returned to education is rising, the extent of the increase is disappointing. It also appears that certain sections of society still feel they are excluded from adult education, or that available provision is not relevant to their needs.

Greater numbers of adults are being encouraged to return to education, however, because of the high priority currently placed on adult education in many quarters. One of the major forces behind the push to increase participation has been government policy towards education and training for employment. The creation of a flexible and adaptable workforce has been a key focus for a number of years, and the philosophy of the market economy clearly has had an important influence on the way in which the relationship between education and training on the one hand, and the world of work on the other, is currently conceived. Workers, along with educational providers, are no longer encouraged to think in terms of job-specific skills acquired early on in life and intended to be sufficient for the whole of a working career. Rather, the emphasis is on developing the ability to adapt quickly to ever-changing demands in the market place and the ever-increasing pace of

technological change. Demographic factors, too - the impact of an ageing population on the job market, for example, or the changing expectations of women's career patterns - have been influential in raising the profile of educational opportunities for groups of adults who traditionally were not expected or encouraged to participate.

A second stimulus has been the powerful cultural tradition in this country which holds that education is beneficial for the individual student. Apart from offering enhanced career opportunities, it is held that 'being an educated person' leads to greater personal fulfilment and greater involvement in society. Past studies of adult returners have focused not only on the employment gains to be made by returning to education, but also on the ways in which adults' positive experiences of education have led to increasing confidence and self-awareness and a greater ability and willingness to contribute to society. Interestingly, children are also thought to benefit from their parents' return to education: the more educated their parents become, the more likelihood there appears to be of children following suit.

Some commentators, however, have countered this view by arguing that adult education (and indeed, all forms of formal education) seeks to perpetuate social norms rather than transform them. Certain groups of people - as we shall see - are considerably less likely to participate in adult education than others (Munn and MacDonald, 1988; McGivney, 1990). Researchers in the field of adult basic education in the United States, for example, have described the situation there as a 'creaming operation' (Hayes and Darkenwald, 1988) attracting only those individuals in tune with middle-class values and norms. In the United Kingdom, Jarvis (1985) has pointed out that adult participation 'is something that is clearly related to both the individual's position in the social system and also to his position in the life cycle' (p 209). The variables of age, gender and educational background can be understood as reproductions of the division of labour in society. Keddie (1980) has commented that the difficulty of attracting adults from lower socio-economic groups to education is a reflection of the divisions in society, rather than a failing on the part of providers.

In recent years, there has developed, in response to this critique, a third perspective, which holds that a radically different educational culture is required in order to create what is termed a 'learning society' (Ransom, 1992), from which all would benefit. This view advocates the 'empowerment curriculum', which values the potential of the individual and seeks to develop positive attitudes and self-esteem among students. This perspective emphasizes active learning styles and constructive assessment methods; encourages awareness among students of their responsibility to the community; and invites the community to take a more active role in helping educational institutions to develop a shared understanding of the curriculum. Though controversial, the notion of a learning society has been influential in focusing attention on the potential of adult education as a force for beneficial social change.

Research questions

In the light of the interest in increasing the numbers of people returning to education, it is important to understand the processes at work in encouraging and enabling adults to participate. This study is the first of four linked investigations into adults' participation, guidance and progression in formal education opportunities. This is the first major qualitative study of Scottish adult returners' own views, and thus, it

is hoped, a valuable complement to the quantitative studies in the United Kingdom and the United States that have gone before. Specifically we sought to:

- identify the reasons for adults deciding to return to education and for choosing particular forms of provision;
- explore the kind of help adults received in making their choice; and
- investigate the extent to which adults have progressed or are intending to progress through different forms of provision.

An understanding of why adults decided to return to education in the first place was clearly of considerable importance in determining the key motivating factors and potential barriers to return. We wanted to establish what the circumstances were which led – or enabled – adults to consider return and what it was that they hoped to achieve through their studies.

It was also essential to consider the help and advice adults had in making the decision to return and, in particular, the extent to which professional guidance agencies were able to direct potential returners towards appropriate provision. We were interested to discover the extent of our respondents' knowledge about providers and provision before they enroled on their courses, and how they arrived at the choices they made.

Finally, we sought to discover what helped our respondents to stay in education and what, over time, they felt they gained from the experience. We wanted to see whether adults' original goals were achieved and what their plans for the future were. We hypothesized that all of these factors would influence students' progression within education and outside it.

Definitions

Adult education need not take place in a classroom. It need not be the result of instruction or teaching and it need not be confined to a formal, institutional programme. The individual, self-directed learning adults undertake (almost) daily should not be ignored in any discussion of adult education: indeed, many adult educators see it as their role to encourage adults to be more effective learners on their own (see Merriam and Caffarella, 1991, for a discussion). Informal learning in this sense is a vast field unto itself.

When considering, however, the *provision* of education, or *access* to education, or *progression* in education, as this study seeks to do, a certain formal element is implied. In these circumstances, education is an opportunity that already exists - it is something that adults *opt into*. It is with this formal, or institutional, context that this research is concerned. In adopting this definition, we are aware that we necessarily narrow our focus to the choices adults make in deciding whether or not to enter into an education system: indeed, entry to this system is a central theme of our research. For our purposes, therefore, we chose to interview participants in four of the most common formal settings in which adults may choose to learn: higher education; further education; community education; and schools. More detailed descriptions of these four settings and the manner in which we collected the data in them follow.

A further proviso must be made in reference to the educational system about which this report is concerned. While the authors are aware that extensive learning

opportunities are often provided in the work place, such private or professional training also falls outside the focus of this paper. This is not because such training is unimportant (though Munn and MacDonald, 1988, did find it was often not considered to be 'education' by participants), but because the field is so vast as to require separate enquiry. The literature concerning the impact of work-based training centres upon labour markets and specific industrial and professional issues lay outwith the remit of this research. For this reason we concentrate here upon the educational opportunities provided by the public, or voluntary, sector. The arguments for such public provision may not hold true for private provision, and we alert readers to this possibility.

Any examination of adult education must also necessarily define what an adult is. Definitions in the literature vary, and for this reason, statistics concerning adult participation are difficult to compare. Often, studies apply different criteria to different education sectors or accept providers' own criteria, which often vary in themselves. As we make no claims about the generalizability of the data and do not attempt to draw rigourous comparisons across provision, it is this last approach we have adopted here (see the Technical Appendix for further details). Our general maxim, drawn from earlier SCRE research (Munn and MacDonald, 1988), was to consider as an adult anyone over the age of 20 who had taken a break from initial compulsory schooling. Readers' attention will be drawn to the implications of differences in definition in relevant sections of this report.

Finally a discussion of the distinction between training and education is important. A vast political and philosophical debate has been generated in this area, and it would serve little purpose to review it here. Traditionally, training refers to the teaching of skills and competencies in a professional sense: that is, training produces workers. Education, on the other hand, is viewed as the development of life skills in a liberal, humanistic framework: that is, education produces citizens. In this report, we view the two terms as, if not synonymous, then overlapping in intent and purpose.

Methodology

Our study consisted of in-depth interviews with 50 adult returners of differing ages, backgrounds and experiences, in a range of formal educational settings. (See the Technical Appendix for details of the way in which the sample was chosen, and methods of data collection and analysis). Table 1.1 displays preliminary details of the sample. Further particulars may be found in Appendix B.

Table 1.1: The educational settings and modes of provision of our sample (Number of participants = 50)

	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Distance Learning*	*Total*
Higher Education	6	4	6	16
Further Education	6	4	4	14
Community Education	0	10	0	10
Schools	1	9	0	10
Total	13	27	10	50

In interview, we asked respondents to talk about the reasons they had decided to return to education and what they hoped to gain; what they felt were the advantages and disadvantages of their provider (the particular educational institution they had chosen) and the provision (the mode of study - full-time, part-time or distance learning; the level at which they were studying; and the particular courses) they had chosen; what they felt they had gained; and what their future intentions were in relation to education and/or employment. We also asked them to talk about the help and advice they had received both before they started their courses and during them.

Why a qualititative study?

We chose to carry out a qualitative study because of the explanatory power of such an approach. As a result of a number of surveys, carried out in both Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom (ACACE, 1982; Munn and MacDonald, 1988; McGivney, 1990; Sargant, 1991) the characteristics of the participants in adult education are now well-known. The fundamental factors characterizing adult students are age, gender and social class. Young adults tend to predominate, as do members of social classes A, B and C. Men appear to be more likely than women to choose work-related courses; and older students (those over 45) seem to opt for general or recreational education while younger students tend to have employment-related aims in view. Further details of these surveys appear in Chapter 4.

Uncovering the reasons for these patterns of participation is a more difficult task. Quantitative studies in the United Kingdom and the United States have aimed to identify what motivates adults to return to education and develop typologies of the reasons adults give for participation - improving employment prospects, or for mental stimulus or personal development, for example. (Johnstone and Rivera, 1965; May, 1985; Kelly 1989; McGivney, 1990). Researchers have also tried to categorize the particular life circumstances - such as employment status, family situation or age - which may prompt people to return (Aslanian and Bricknell, 1980; Cross, 1981). Complementing these studies have been a series of investigations into the reasons for non-participation, focusing on economic, social and psychological barriers from the perspective of non-participant adults (Johnstone and Rivera, 1965; Darkenwald and Merriam, 1982; McGivney, 1990), as well as on the ethos of educational institutions (Cross, 1981) and the politics of adult education (O'Shea, 1975; Keddie, 1980; Jarvis, 1985).

Nevertheless, as Merriam and Caffarella (1991) point out, 'what the field is still searching for is a theory that explains and predicts the phenomenon of participation.' It has proved extremely difficult to integrate the various aspects of return - the personal, the social, the economic, the political - into a more comprehensive picture, and this would seem to indicate the complexities of the issues involved. It is in this context that a qualitative study offers the opportunity to identify some of the forces at work behind the findings of previous researchers and, in particular, to observe the ways in which the different forces for return influence individual students.

Interpreting the data

It is important to note a few general points about the data we collected, so that readers may better understand the context of our findings. Most importantly, it

must be remembered that these are 50 case histories of individuals who do not necessarily represent all adults in education across Scotland. Whilst some irregularities in the sample do represent well-documented national trends (the preponderance of women for example), it is necessary to remember that the individuals were not chosen with any statistical model in mind. No ethnic minorities are present in the sample, and it would be unwise to draw any conclusions about the social groups represented. Though we know that some of our respondents suffered from physical disabilities, we cannot tell - because our data is based on our respondents' own reports - whether any of them had learning difficulties. For these reasons, we cannot make the claims about the generalizability of this data that other large-scale surveys are able to do.

The interview data are, rather, illustrative. They convey the diversity of provision and provide examples of adult learners' experiences of it. They enable understanding of the issues and challenges facing adult returners to education. This study is intended as a departure from statistical surveys which, though able to describe numerically the status of adult education, fail to answer the questions of how and why adults participate.

The report

This report consists of eight chapters, of which this is the first. Subsequent chapters look firstly at participation and the extent to which respondents' decisions to return to education and the choices they make are influenced by the goals they set themselves, and by their life circumstances. We also look at the ways - formal and informal - in which potential returners come to find out about the existence of providers and the provision available to them.

We then investigate how easy or difficult it was for adults in our sample to stay in education once they had returned. Personal and institutional factors are identified and the role of guidance services is examined. Finally, we look at what our respondents felt they had gained from their experiences in education, and at their future intentions. The nature of progression is discussed and the role of guidance for progression is also considered.

We conclude with a discussion of the policy implications of our findings.

2 Why do adults participate in education?

There is now an extensive literature on the reasons for adult participation. Much of this has been derived from questionnaire-based surveys of adults. This literature tells us a great deal about the characteristics of adult participants, their motivations for returning to education and the barriers they face. It has also identified under-represented groups and explored the reasons for their lack of participation in education. However, we are still some way from a theory of adult participation which has explanatory and predictive power. We know that psychological factors are important in understanding participation but that a study of individual motives or intent provides only a partial explanation. The social and economic situation in which adults find themselves is also crucial to understanding participation, as is the availability of places in the education system and the attitude of education providers to adult students. In addition the availability of good quality information is important. These key areas of motivation, social and economic situation, information provision and images of education providers helped to delineate the main areas to be covered in interview with our sample of adult students. The interviews were fairly unstructured and wide-ranging, providing in-depth accounts about participation which would perhaps provide a different perspective on participation from the larger scale surveys which necessarily used tightly structured questionnaires. From the questions we asked in interview, we were able to obtain information from respondents about many different aspects of their lives and educational experiences. The data gave us a good deal of insight into the challenges facing adults and their reasons for participation. The following three 'snapshots' provide examples of the sorts of life histories we gathered.

> *Margaret had always wanted to be a registered nurse: it was, she told us, 'all I have ever wanted to do'. When she left school twenty-eight years ago, however, she had no qualifications. Long-term illness as a child had interrupted her schooling to the extent that the teachers 'thought I was going to die anyway – and they used to give me comics and things in the class ... by the time I went to my secondary, I felt like I was on another planet.' After a series of temporary jobs, she married and had a family. She later started work as an untrained auxiliary nurse, but had to leave her job in order to care for her terminally ill mother. She provided 24-hour nursing for her mother for two years, during which she started work again, two nights a week, to help the family's finances. When her mother died, Margaret 'fell to bits'. In an effort to help her come to terms with her grief and get back among people, Margaret's sister took her to swimming classes – and when Margaret learned to swim after 30 years of trying without success, she thought, 'If I could learn to swim, what could I do next?' She enroled in leisure classes at her daughter's school, and gradually built up the confidence to consider her own future. With the encouragement of colleagues at the nursing home where she worked, she investigated the entry requirements for nursing college: she told us that for the first time in her life 'there was nothing to hold me back!' When we spoke to her, she was completing the five qualifications required for the training course by the distance learning route at the local college. She anticipated that the following year, at the age of 44, she would begin her training and fulfil her dream.*

David told us that his time at school 'was the most depressing period of my life.' He left without qualifications at the age of 16. He started work on an oil rig soon afterwards, and was able to pursue ONC, OND, and HNC courses, paid for by his employer. He found that 'once I'd started getting involved educationally with the things I was interested in – engineering – I found it a lot easier to work and to understand and to be happy with the studying.' At the time we spoke to him, ten years after having left school, he was an oil rig technician, spending two weeks out of every five on a platform in the North Sea. In the three weeks during which he was on dry land, he was pursuing a full-time degree course in mechanical engineering at the local institute of higher education. He was finding the strain of fitting a full-time course into three-week blocks 'Hellish' and hadn't 'had a holiday with my wife since we got married ... so it's causing a lot of problems at home.' He was, however, in his final year and determined to finish the course. He hoped to go on to do his Masters: his ultimate goal was to become a chartered member of the Institute of Marine Engineers.

Claire was a 34-year old single parent. She had two children, aged four and six. She had loathed school and left at the age of 15 with four O-grades. Soon afterwards, she married and moved to England. She had held a number of jobs: working variously as a waitress; for the civil service; and as an EFL teacher. As a mature student she had pursued several SCOTVEC modules and Highers, but failed many of them because of the demands of her work and family. Her marriage failed, and shortly before we spoke to her, she moved back to her childhood home in a large Scottish city. The divorce had left her emotionally scarred and in financial difficulties: the move had left her feeling isolated and alone. She did not have a job because she could not afford child care for her youngest, and the family was surviving on benefits. She was clearly depressed and worried by her situation. Yet when we spoke to here, she was pursuing SCOTVEC modules in drama provided at the local community centre. Why did she choose to return to education? She told us, 'This is me trying to get back. [I wanted] to provide my youngest son with some type of nursery education and give myself something. To take my mind off everything I was going through at the time ... It gives me the chance to meet other people – otherwise I would be totally isolated ... I was given encouragement and support. It gave me the opportunity to get to know people in the area. Not only has it helped me get myself sorted out, it's given support for me and my children.'

These are only three of the 50 stories we gathered, yet they are representative in their complexity and diversity. In our analysis, we were eager to develop a conceptualization of participation that did not conceal these individual differences and, indeed, would help to explain participation in reference to them.

With this aim in mind, we identified two factors that seemed to influence every individual's participation choices: their motives and purposes for returning to education, which we called their goals; and the circumstances (social, economic and many others) which had influenced their decision to return. We used the term conditions to describe the huge variety of circumstances which adults told us had played a part in their decision to participate in education. We examine each of these two factors more fully, below.

Goals

When we speak of adults' goals, we speak of their motives or purposes for returning to education. What do they hope to achieve through participation? What particular outcomes do they anticipate? We turn now to what these three stories tell us about adults' goals, and the questions they raise for the following chapter of this report.

Each of the three individuals we have described had clear ideas about what they hoped to achieve. Margaret, for instance, had more than one goal. She believed that

her participation was the first step in a progression that would end when she became a nurse. While her immediate goal was the attaining of relevant certificates for nursing college, her ultimate or long-term goal was a new job in a new field. Thus adults can have short-term and long-term goals as far as participation is concerned.

David, too, had a variety of goals, but these had changed during his course. Initially, he had been seeking the promotion in his job that would result from better qualifications. But as time progressed and he saw what he could achieve, he was extending his aims to include further qualifications and enhanced professional prestige. Thus goals can change over time. This is a phenomenon identified by many writers and one which we consider in greater depth in Chapter 7, when we discuss the gains adults reported they had made from participation.

Claire was trying to rebuild her life and provide something positive for her children after a period of family upheaval. Unlike Margaret and David, she did not have specific plans to enter employment or progress to the next stage of education. Rather, she had hopes that education provision would have personal benefits both for herself and her children in terms of support and friendship. Indeed, the circumstances in which Claire found herself, moving back to an area where she felt isolated, concerned for the future of her children and beset by financial worries, clearly had an impact on her decision to participate in a drama class. It is important to stress then that goals are only part of the explanation for participation and sometimes not the most convincing part. Sometimes it is the circumstances in which adults find themselves that lead them to participate even if they are unsure or unclear about their goals for doing so.

For these adults, then, goals ranged from gaining qualifications and finding a better job (in broad terms, goals related to employment) to enhancing personal status and avoiding or solving family problems (personal goals). It was also clear that adults could have a variety of goals which they hoped would be attained through participation. In analysing the interviews therefore, we pursued the following questions:

- *What other goals did adults tell us about ?*
- *Were some goals more common than others?*
- *What different types of goals exist? Can they be categorized?*

We discuss the answers to these questions in the next chapter. For the moment we wish to highlight the importance of goals in understanding participation and to stress that:

- goals can be short-term or long-term;
- goals can change over time;
- goals can be personal as well as employment related; and that
- adults can hold a number of goals simultaneously.

Of particular interest was a search for an explanation of the attraction of education as a way of realising goals. This lead us to ask:

- *Why did adults think education was an appropriate means of achieving their goals?*

Furthermore, each of these three individuals had made very different choices: Margaret was following a distance learning route at college; David was pursuing a full-time degree at university; and Claire was attending classes at the community centre a few mornings a week. We were interested in the interaction of various goals and the effects certain goals might have on participation choices.

- *How far do goals appear to affect adults' choice of provision?*
- *How far do goals appear to affect adults' choice* of setting?

It seemed to us that adults' goals were associated with the circumstances in which they found themselves: Margaret needed to obtain qualifications for nursing college because, quite simply, she had left school with none. David had left school without qualifications, too, but positive educational experience after this (paid for by his employer) had engendered new interest in his job and encouraged him to seek further qualifications. Claire might not have been participating at all if it hadn't been for her loneliness and unhappiness. We were unsure, however of the direction of the association. Did circumstances affect goals or were goals pursued despite rather than because of certain circumstances? This lead us to ask:

- *What is the relationship between goals and circumstances in terms of participation?*

We turn now to a discussion of the circumstances which adults talked about, and that we have called conditions.

Conditions

A whole host of circumstances appeared to be at work on the decisions made by Margaret, David and Claire. They were all of different ages and backgrounds. They had differing family commitments. They did, however, share certain experiences: school; education after leaving school; marriage; and employment. Yet the quality of these experiences was not always similar.

Each of the three had negative experiences of school, for example, but the causes for this differed and subsequent educational experiences varied. For Margaret, enjoyable and successful leisure classes paved the way for further participation. David gained confidence by achieving certificates in employment-related courses. Claire had enjoyed her further education, but was unable to complete many courses successfully because of outside pressures. Clearly, these experiences helped to shape later participation. Many writers have commented upon the importance of school experience as a factor affecting participation. It has sometimes been suggested that unhappy or unsuccessful school experience turns adults away from subsequent participation. Our interviews presented a more complex picture, because many of the sample reported negative school experiences and yet this had not prevented them from returning to education. There is also strong evidence that the 'more education adults have the more they want.' We were particularly interested in charting the educational experiences of the sample in the hope of gaining insights into the way these influenced participation choices. We asked:

- *What had respondents' school experiences been like?*
- *How far did school experience affect subsequent participation?*
- *Had respondents already participated in education since school? What had these experiences been like?*
- *How far did post-school education experience affect subsequent participation?*
- *How far did these experiences influence adults' goals later on?*

We have also seen how other commitments affected participation. Family was an important factor for each of these three adults, either in terms of discouraging or helping to facilitate participation. Margaret, though eager to return, had been unable to do so due to a number of barriers, most of which were related to her family responsibilities. David's wife was unsupportive of his participation and this could affect his progression plans. Claire, as we have seen, had been unable to complete previous courses successfully because of child care commitments. One of the reasons for her current participation was that the community centre where she was attending classes had provision for pre-school children. Again, many writers have documented the need for good quality child care as a way of promoting participation of parents of young children and have highlighted the importance of family support in both encouraging and sustaining participation. We were alert in our analysis for data concerning the following questions:

- *What were the family commitments of participants?*
- *How far do family commitments influence participation choices?*
- *How far do family commitments influence goals?*

Finally, all three participants were either working or had worked at some point in their lives. Clearly, employment affected participation patterns: Margaret was following a distance learning course because it fitted in with her work, and David was pursuing his part-time course for the same reason. Employment also influenced goals, as we have seen: it was the desire for certain types of jobs that had motivated Margaret and David initially. Claire was unemployed – but this was the result of her family commitments. So clearly, conditions can affect one another as well as goals and participation. This lead us to ask:

- *What was the employment status of participants?*
- *How far does employment status influence participation choices?*
- *How far does employment status influence goals?*

So far we have highlighted three broad categories of conditions or circumstances that affected participation. These are:

- previous education
- family circumstances
- employment status.

These are presented only by way of illustration and by no means encompass all the conditions which adults identified. They show, furthermore, the complexity of the effects of some conditions on participation. For instance, our data reveal that an

unsuccessful or unhappy time at school is not, on its own, a good predictor of an adult's predisposition to participate and that a number of conditions interact to affect participation. One of the strengths of in-depth interviewing is that it allows a more thorough exploration than is possible in survey work of the kinds of circumstances which adults see as important in affecting their participation. We sought to examine some of the key variables which surveys have shown to be influential in affecting participation and hopefully increase our understanding of the ways such variables influence adults in their decisions to return to education.

The relationship between goals and conditions

Our conceptualization of participation, then, is to see it as determined by individuals' goals and conditions. There are several types of goals and adults can have one goal or many: these can provide an important motivation for returning to education. Moreover, goals are often a function of the conditions in adults' lives: that is, goals such as getting a better job can arise from a particular set of circumstances in which adults find themselves such as being made redundant, divorce or having an enthusiastic employer willing to pay for the upgrading of skills and knowledge.

Conditions are themselves varied and inter-dependent. These, too, can provide motivation for returning to education whilst at the same time affecting participation choices. For example, a woman with young children may be seeking to enrol in courses to get herself out of the house, but may be limited as to the sorts of provision she may choose due to family commitments. It is only when certain conditions are met that return is feasible. It is possible to see conditions operating at two levels; the supply side, conditions such as the ethos of educational institutions which make them disposed or not to encourage participation by adult students; the availability of information and support of various kinds for adults interested in participation; a culture which sees education as an effective means of fulfilling certain goals; and the demand side, the personal and individual circumstances surrounding each adult which can affect goals and the mode of participation such as the decision to enrol in full-time, part-time or distance learning provision.

Participation, then, results from the interplay of these two factors. First, an adult must have goals that s/he feels can be realized through a return to education. Second, conditions in the adult's life, which help to shape goals, must be such that a return to education is possible. When goals and conditions are balanced – when education is both desired and possible – then participation results. A conceptualization of this idea looks like this:

We have seen, using three examples, that the relationship between goals and conditions varies from individual to individual. By examining the rest of the data, we sought to understand more fully the relationship between these two elements, and see if any patterns emerged. In particular we wished to investigate the following:

- *Are goals and conditions always in harmony with one another?*
- *What happens when goals and conditions conflict?*
- *Are certain goals or conditions 'dominant' in determining participation?*

It is important to make clear that we do not not see participation necessarily as the result of a rational decision-making process with adults consciously reflecting on their goals, weighing up the feasibility of participation given their particular set of circumstances and coming to a well-informed conclusion about the best form of participation for them. Some adults do go through this process – or at least they told us they did so. For many others, however, participation seems much more haphazard. Often a particular set of circumstances promotes participation. For instance, Marion had already been going along to the local unemployment centre for some time when outreach workers there encouraged her to take up leisure classes provided by a regional collaborative project. As a creche was offered, she was able to bring her youngest child with her to classes. Her initial participation in drama and woodwork was a prelude to more demanding modules in word processing and the formulation of personal and, possibly, employment goals.

In the following two chapters, we seek to answer the questions raised by this line of thinking. We will begin by describing individuals' goals in Chapter 3.

Summary

- Individuals' participation in adult education opportunities is the result of two factors, which we have called goals and conditions, interacting in complex ways.
- Adults' decision to return is often not the result of a rational process: although many adults have goals which they hope to realize through participation, others find themselves drawn to education as a result of a variety of circumstances.

3 Purposes for return

In seeking to answer the question 'What purposes did adults have for returning to education?', we were struck by the diversity of goals that were described to us in interview. Some of this diversity has been noted by other writers. For instance in the first large-scale study of its kind, Johnstone and Rivera (1965) found that employment goals dominated adults' explanations for their participation in education. This finding was confirmed by a subsequent survey, again in the United States, by the National Center for Educational Statistics in 1984. This found that 64% of respondents cited job-related reasons for their participation in education (cited in Merriam and Caffarella, 1991). More recent studies have suggested a wider range of purposes for participation. For example, McGivney (1990) identified seven goals which adults might hope to achieve in returning to education: acquiring knowledge; developing themselves professionally and personally; meeting the requirements of employers; meeting new people; helping their community; fulfilling religious need; finding diversion and stimulation. Similarly, Kelly (1989) in a study for the Open University of older undergraduates' reasons for participation highlighted the following: to keep mentally alert; for interest; for personal development; and to gain qualifications. Munn and MacDonald (1988), in their study of adult participation in Scotland, suggest that adults can have multiple reasons for returning and that these reasons can change over time. Other researchers have used demographic variables as a way of explaining adults' desire to return to study. Cross (1981) sees sex, age, education, social class and employment status as the keys to understanding the purposes of participation:

> The reasons people give for their learning correspond consistently and logically to [their] life situations. (p 91)

Thus, people in jobs are interested in education to get better jobs or to advance in the jobs they already have. Women, manual workers and the poorly educated seek educational opportunities to prepare for new jobs. Men are more interested in job-related learning than women at home. Those who are more advantaged can afford the luxury of education for recreational or social purposes and so on. Cross' ideas are closely related to those of the proponents of theories of 'life transitions' and life cycle (eg Aslanian and Bricknell, 1980) as a way of understanding the specific goals which adults have in returning to education. We explore ideas about the relationship between particular kinds of goals and the life circumstances of adults in the next chapter. For the moment our concern is with the kinds of goals which adults talked about as reasons for their participation in education. We were interested in whether the kinds of goals which had been identified through large-scale quantitative studies were also revealed in our qualitative work.

We have seen that both employment and personal goals were important determinants of three adults' return. Was this true of the rest of the sample? Did other kinds of goals emerge? This chapter opens with a description of the goals

adults told us about in interview and discusses the most common in some detail. The chapter goes on to consider types of goals and their effects on where and how adults chose to study.

Types of goals

Jean and Alan had different stories to tell, but they had a common purpose in returning to education: to find a better job. Both of them felt that the enhanced qualifications and skills that might accrue from participation (at whatever level) would increase their chances in the labour market. **Employment goals** such as these were common amongst the respondents: indeed, most respondents told us that labour market concerns were at the centre of their decision to return to education. Many hoped that benefits arising from education might help them to get better jobs or, indeed, employment for the first time. Adults' work experience and employment status, as Cross (1981) argued, largely determined their precise goals: that is, whether they were seeking to work for the first time; to change jobs; promotion; or were eager to find work after a long period at home. Although the acquisition of skills was a subtext in most of the interviews, many individuals were more concerned about the visible results of their studies: the qualifications that resulted from them. Qualifications were seen as vital evidence of effort and achievement – perhaps the only evidence in which prospective employers might be interested.

Jean, twenty-four years old with three children, had had 'absolutely hundreds of jobs' since leaving school without qualifications, but had never enjoyed any of them sufficiently to work at them more than a few weeks. She attributed her inability to find suitable employment to her lack of qualifications:

Last summer I was working as a casual in the post office and I was looking at all these people around me, and they were all on auto-pilot: totally brain dead. I thought, 'I don't want to do this for the rest of my life'. That's how I decided to phone [the college] ... I would like to do something where I was guaranteed a job at the end.

Alan was a twenty-eight year old man who had worked as a fibre-optic technician for an international electronics company in the South of England before moving to Scotland to get married. He had taken the opportunity provided by this natural 'break' to return to education. When we spoke with him, he was completing the third year of a BSc in chemical engineering. What did he hope to gain?

I'd always wanted my degree ... The job I was doing was a good job, well-paid, but I'd gone as far as I could with the sort of qualifications I had. [After I moved to Scotland] I could have stopped and looked for a job up here, but I wouldn't have had any qualifications to recommend me ... I'd prefer to be unemployed and have an honours degree than be unemployed and have no qualifications ... I'm hoping to gain security with good qualifications. I shouldn't have too much trouble finding a job.

Employment goals (and, indeed, any goals) could be proactive or reactive. Proactive goals arose from choices individuals were making voluntarily about their own lives: reactive goals arose from circumstances over which individuals felt they had no control, or which seemed to lead individuals inexorably along one path. Unsurprisingly, the most common source of reactive employment goals was redundancy. Individuals who had been made redundant or whose partners had made redundant often found themselves re-evaluating their priorities and new life aims often resulted. Proactive goals could

Fiona was being forced back into the labour market at the age of 40 because her husband had been made redundant. She had worked as a secretary after leaving school, but left her job to have a family. She felt that her age and lack of experience with modern office technology left her at a disadvantage in the stiff competition for jobs:

At 40 I hit an impasse ... I had to do something positive. I had to find new skills, you know, to bring everything up to date. To [show] employers I was serious. I'm not out, in the end, for education, I'm out for the work: and this is a work qualification. So I'm hoping I'll get work at the end of it.

concern promotion, career change or, for those who had not worked for a long time, a career launch. The nature of proactive and reactive goals will be more fully considered in the following chapter on life circumstances.

Not all adults were participating to achieve employment goals, however: many adults had more personal reasons for attending classes. This was anticipated from previous research. Fay, for example, was not employed – neither was she seeking work. Rather, she had returned to school to be with her friends and pursue subjects that she enjoyed and in which she was interested. **Interest** was cited by a number of respondents as their main reason for participation. This might include the enjoyment of leisure classes and school subjects such as that described by Fay, or it might involve the pursuing of degrees at university. For example, a 33-year old systems programmer who was studying to obtain a chemistry degree with the Open University, was doing so purely out of interest. Although some of these adults were pursuing courses purely for the sake of the subject many professed to having additional goals, such as meeting people or getting out of the house.

Fay had been coming along to classes at a community school for six years: although she had started out taking leisure courses put on especially for adults, her interest soon spread to more 'academic subjects'. She told us about her reasons for coming along initially:

I used to come up and see my friends here. And they had decided to come back for interest and to meet other people - it was cookery that we were doing, then. You put the kids in the creche. Then we ventured out [to] arithmetic O-level. I done word processing, accounts, all different things. Basically, I've just come for interest, and I've met a lot of people.

Some respondents, such as Liz, stated that getting out of the house was their main reason for return. Such **avoidance goals** were common with, although not exclusive to, young unemployed women with small children – especially those who were single parents or who had unsympathetic partners. Avoidance goals could also result from poor health: one woman with whom we spoke had been struck by osteoporosis at the age of 54: she had always worked, but was forced to take early retirement on grounds of ill health and would never be able to get a job again. For her, education was a substitute for work; a way of getting out and keeping her mind active. For individuals with avoidance goals, educating oneself is seen as a way of 'breaking out' of an unpleasant situation.

Liz, a young mother of three, had stopped work at a newspaper to have her family and found herself bored and frustrated after 11 years at home:

It was ten years since I'd worked full time ... I felt I was vegetating. [I needed] to get myself out and feel alive again ... The only company I had was either my own kids or the mothers of kids my kids' ages, and the conversation ... I dreaded meeting them. I felt I was going over the same thing. I felt as if I had to break away from them. I was going round the bend.

Sometimes, individuals who reported that they were trying to avoid such unpleasant circumstances also had more subtle, additional reasons for participating. These were people who, like Christine, were actively trying to change their situation and gain **social advancement**. By this we mean people who in some sense wanted to 'better themselves'. We distinguish this kind of goal from more straightforward employment goals because social advancement was not always associated with employment as far as the adults were concerned. As Christine makes clear, her

Christine was twenty-one years of age and the single parent of two pre-school children. She lived in an area of severe economic and social deprivation. She had left school at 15 without qualifications and had never worked:

I've got to go and do something to better myself ... I've got a responsibility with the kids and I've always wanted the best for me and them but I can't afford that ... I've got to better myself for a career that [will keep] me in money ... I want to do it so when the kids bring me homework, I can help them.

attendance at basic literacy and numeracy classes related to her own view of herself as someone who was lacking key skills and unable to provide a better life for herself and her children as a consequence. Children often influenced these adults' goals. Some parents were concerned that they lacked the skills to help their youngsters with school work, whilst another, larger group of adults felt an obligation to their children to better themselves so that the children would have some of the chances that parents had missed, or, more fundamentally, so that they would break away from a particular set of social and cultural values which were seen as lacking. Whilst social advancement could be a personal goal, it could also be a goal projected on to the entire family, where participation is undertaken for the **sake of children**.

Others had decided to return for the purpose of **self-satisfaction**. Consider the two very different examples of Margaret and Jane. They had each come into education with vastly different experiences and knowledge bases, but were participating for similar reasons. Margaret wanted the gratification of finally obtaining the qualification she felt would best represent her abilities – and which had long eluded her. Jane's lack of basic skills had eaten away at her self confidence: she stressed to us she was seeking to improve these skills for her own satisfaction, rather than for the benefits they might provide for future employment. Self-satisfaction, then, might result from the gaining of qualifications or from the gaining of skills: a number of people reported that these were their *personal* reasons for participation.

Margaret was 36-year-old lab technician at a technical college who had tried on several occasions to obtain advanced qualifications: she had dropped out of university to 'see the world' and left an HNC course to have a family. She now felt she was ready to undertake this 'unfinished business':

I didn't have the opportunity once, I had it twice - and I threw it away both times ... We had a part-time lecturer come in - she's my age, she has two children - and I used to think, 'What are you doing here? I can do this better than you!' But she has a bit of paper I don't have ... It's vanity ... the badge ... I want something that's mine ... I have this wee magical vision: I get the degree, and there's nothing beyond that. I can see myself in exactly the same situation as it is now, but I have this bit of paper ... I'm not very ambitious. I can't see wanting any more.

Jane was a young woman taking basic literacy classes. She had left school unable to read or write and felt she needed to improve:

If somebody says to you 'Read this' and you sit and look at it and you can't read it, it's dead embarassing, especially for an 18-year old ... It was something I wanted to do ... If you want to better yourself, you're the person who's got to do it ... [It's going to] help me. Give me back my confidence.

A summary of goals

We have described the goals adults told us about in interview, and seen that adults' reasons for returning to education varied greatly. The following table shows the frequency of goals that adults described to us. Only 14 people mentioned that they had only one goal. The rest were able to talk about more.

Table 3.1: Adults' reasons for participating in education

Goal	*number of respondents (n=50)*
to get a better job	24
to gain qualifications	17
avoidance	10
for self-satisfaction	9
for interest	9
to update/learn new skills	9
for progression	6
to change	4
for children's sake	3
participation at suggestion of employer	2
for social advancement	2
for health reasons	2
to enhance status at work	1

It can be seen from this list that a wider range of goals than those identified from survey research emerged from this in-depth study of 50 adults. However, they fall into two broad categories of goals, those concerning employment and those of a more personal nature. These were highlighted by previous research mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. As we shall see, to categorise goals in this way, although useful, is to camouflage the mixture and changing hierarchies of goals, and to underestimate the complexity of the decisions adults make about participation in education.

Mixtures and hierarchies of goals

Most individuals did not have, simply, employment or personal goals: many described a mixture of both. Consider the women at home who, after years of caring for children, felt the need to re-assert their own identity – often by starting work again. Employment, for many of our sample, had a real significance in terms of self-worth. People for whom social advancement was important also saw a new career as one mechanism by which this goal could be realized. Qualifications, too, were sought for a variety of reasons: people valued them for their own sake, as proof of their ability and steadfastness, but they were also viewed as useful in the job market.

People tended to distinguish, too, between long-term and short-term goals. In some cases, employment was an immediate goal, while for others it was a somewhat more distant prospect. These adults often had a job in mind, and had mapped out a plan that would enable them to realize, ultimately, their ambitions. These were generally individuals who did not have sufficient qualifications from school or previous adult education to gain access to their desired course: this will be discussed more fully in Chapter 7. Similarly, while self-realization might be the ultimate goal, intermediate steps such as gaining qualifications and a job might be the more short-term targets through which this goal could be realized. It is interesting to note that long-term goals, particularly, were apt to change during the course of participation: this will also be discussed more fully in Chapter 7.

The effects of goals on participation choices

We wondered how far adults' goals influenced the various choices they had to make in returning to education. Did certain individuals with certain goals tend to drift towards certain varieties of provision or towards certain settings? To answer this question, we divided respondents into two groups: those whose primary goal was employment-related, and those whose primary goal was more personal. We divided the goals in the previous table as follows:

Employment goals	Personal goals
to get a better job	avoidance
to gain qualifications (for employment)	for self-satisfaction
to update/learn new skills (for employment)	for interest
for progression	to change
participation at suggestion of employer	for children's sake
to enhance status at work	for social advancement
	for health reasons
	to gain qualifications (for personal reasons)
	to gain skills (for personal reasons)

We turn now to an examination of goals and participation, using these broad categories.

Goals and the choice of course and subject

Previous research has demonstrated how difficult it is to categorise courses unequivocally as vocational or non-vocational (Lowden et al, 1990; Marks and Elsdon, 1991). This was confirmed on analysing our data. Courses, which on the face of it, one might have characterised as clearly being employment-related were being undertaken for personal interest reasons.

Adults' idea of 'leisure' varied greatly. Whilst many adults – participating for personal reasons – were involved in 'non-vocational' courses such as swimming and badminton, some were also attending more vocational classes such as Standard Grade computing and SCOTVEC accounts – purely for personal enjoyment! We have already seen that one man was pursuing degree level chemistry 'for the fun of it'.

James worked in personnel and training at an international electronics manufacturer. He was studying psychology at degree level for personal reasons:

It kind of developed over the last four or five years. Before I could give a name to it, I was interested ... you know - people-watching. I was fascinated with the way that people behave and trying to understand the reasons behind it ... My starting point was personal interest.

Graeme was studying Standard Grade English, modern studies, and mathematics. He was not working at the time we spoke to him, and was participating for employment reasons:

I wanted to get a wee bit more education ... You need qualifications in jobs now days. Your qualifications might not be relevant - all they want to know is, 'Can you study? Are you prepared to put the work in?' That's all they want to know. They're not interested if you've got an O-grade in this, that, or whatever. [They are] just interested in the fact that you worked at it and put the effort in ... Coming back and getting educated - it gives you that wee bit of confidence in going out and looking for jobs.

Similarly, many respondents were likely to see 'vocational' potential in traditionally academic courses: they viewed any course as having employment-related benefits, as long as some sort of certification was forthcoming upon completion. So, employment-oriented adults were equally pre-disposed to Standard Grade Modern Studies and Higher

English as to modules in Information Technology and Office Skills. The important factor did not appear to be actual subject choice but rather adults' belief that a subject qualification, whatever it might be, would be seen as useful by employers.

The following table shows the distribution of various subjects amongst people with different goals. Of course, some people were taking more than one subject. They are counted more than once in the table.

Table 3.2: Adults' goals and subject choices

	Goals	
	Employment	*Personal*
English*	10	4
Maths*	5	4
Arts degree	2	3
Leisure classes (not certificated)	–	3
History, modern studies, modern languages*	6	2
Science degree	4	4
Information technology*	5	2
Sciences*	5	1
Art, drama*	–	5
Social Work diploma	3	–
Accounting*	2	1
OU short courses in child care	–	2
OND Engineering	2	–
SWAP	2	–
Basic literacy	–	2
Office skills	1	–
Technical subjects*	–	1

*Denotes Standard Grade, Higher or modular subjects

The striking aspect of this data is the varied motives different adults had for taking the same courses. The implications are important: whilst courses are generally acknowledged to be 'vocational' if they lead to a job-related qualification, this is not the opinion of the adults who participate in them. It is impossible to distinguish between job-related and non job-related courses in this way. Government policy in England and Wales which targets funding only at vocational courses thus runs the risk of supporting some students attending courses for personal interest and not others.

Goals and the choice of full-time, part-time or distance learning

We were interested to discover if adults with certain types of goals were predisposed to certain types of provision. Whilst conditions (such as employment or family commitments) were more likely to be stated in interview as a reason for choice of provision (and will therefore be discussed in the following chapter), examination of the data revealed that there were patterns to be found between choice of provision and goals, as well. Adults with employment goals were most likely to participate in full-time study or distance learning programmes, whilst those participating for personal reasons were more likely to be attending part-time.

Table 3.3: Goals and choice of provision

	Employment goals	*Personal goals*
Full-time participaton (N = 13)	11	2
Part-time participation (N = 27)	11	16
Distance learning (N = 10)	8	2

It is perhaps not unusual that those returning for personal reasons should be most likely to participate part-time, as they see education primarily as a leisure pursuit. We were surprised, however, even given our small sample, to find so few working adults attending part-time classes – particularly as we had anticipated that those who were working would probably fit their studies into their evenings, or day release. They seemed to prefer distance learning as a way of balancing commitments, however, and none had considered (or had knowledge of) provision in the evenings. This will be discussed more fully in the following chapter.

The employers of those in our sample were reported as generally unwilling to fund participation on a day-release basis: most of those who were in work had approached their employers for secondments, but had them denied. These adults had two options: either to undertake a distance learning course (which three had done), or give up work altogether in order to undertake study on a grant or loan (the solution of another three). This latter option was seen as particularly attractive, despite the financial sacrifices involved, where a complete change of career was desired, as a full-time course takes less time and the qualification could be obtained sooner. Employers were not expected to fund courses undertaken for employees wishing to make a radical career change, taking them away from their current employment. Again, the conditions surrounding these choices will be explored further in the following chapter.

Goals and the choice of settings

We also sought to discover whether individuals' goals were related to the setting in which they chose to pursue their education. Although in most cases, choice of setting was a function of the qualifications already held by individuals when they made their decision to return, the data for community education and further education is particularly striking.

Table 3.4: Goals and choice of setting

	Employment goals	*Personal goals*
Community education (N = 10)	2	8
Further education (N = 14)	12	2
Schools (N = 10)	7	3
Higher education (N = 16)	9	7

Clearly, participants in community education tended to return for personal reasons – this is consistent with the stated aims of such providers, and with the fact

that many of the courses pursued by those in community education were not certificated (and therefore seen as less valuable in the labour market). It seems that further education was the least attractive setting in which to pursue personal goals, but the most attractive for those related to employment. Schools and institutions of higher education, however, were seen as appropriate settings for a wide variety of goals. Was this how providers perceived themselves? How far were adults choosing settings that were appropriate to their goals? Clearly, guidance has a role to play in ensuring congruence between adults' purposes in returning and the setting in which they choose to do so. This whole area is one that will be addressed in Chapter 5.

We also wondered whether goals might influence the choice of provider, itself. Not surprisingly, this choice seemed to have much more to do with supply side conditions (eg the location of institutions and costs of attendance) than with goals – although where goals were employment-oriented and a particular course was seen as relevant to those goals, an individual might travel to an inconvenient, expensive provider. Non-optimal providers, therefore, might be 'endured' where a particular course was seen as a valuable investment for the future.

We have seen that, in the majority of cases, the reasons stated for the choice of different varieties of provision were often more to do with conditions than goals. We turn now to a closer examination of the circumstances of the individuals in our sample.

Summary

- Adults described two categories of goals in interview: employment goals (such as getting a better job or updating qualifications) and personal goals (such as avoidance or for personal satisfaction).
- Although most adults reported that their goals were employment-related, they also had additional, personal goals. Adults could have one goal, many goals, or no goals at all.
- Goals could be long-term or short-term; proactive or reactive.
- No courses in particular attracted those with employment or personal goals: distinguishing between vocational and non-vocational courses, therefore, fails to reflect the purposes adults have for pursuing them.
- Most adults in community education settings returned for personal reasons, whilst most of those in further education had employment goals. Schools and higher education institutions were seen as appropriate settings for the realization of a wider variety of goals.

4 Life circumstances and return

We have seen that adults often return to education for a purpose, that these purposes can vary in precision and can change over time. However, to view participation as a strictly rational process, with a particular purpose or goal in mind, is, in our view, mistaken. Adults' life circumstances can strongly influence their decision to return to education and can also shape their purposes in doing so. Indeed, sometimes a purpose or goal comes later and it is the life circumstances of adults that play the most important part in the decision to return. One of the advantages of in-depth interviewing is that it allows an exploration of the kinds of life circumstances which adults saw as important influences on participation and so adds to our knowledge of these.

More importantly though, such interviewing can elicit the often subtle ways in which a whole range of circumstances operate. It became clear, for example, that dependent children affected women, in particular, in their decision to participate. This operated in very different ways. For some women, getting away from the children was the key to participation and schools with under fives' centres were a haven. For others, full-time courses were out of the question until the children were off their hands. This could mean when the children started primary school or when the children started secondary school or when they had finished school and were launched in further or higher education or in jobs.

This chapter explores six key life circumstances which previous research has shown to be influential in participation. They are:

- age
- gender
- family situation
- employment
- school and post-school educational experience.

We begin with a brief justification for the selection of these particular circumstances before describing their salience for our respondents. We conclude that the same life circumstances operate in different ways on individuals' lives and on their decisions to return. Thus the search for a single best solution to encourage participation is misguided unless it is to encourage and sustain a diversity of provision by a diversity of providers. Rather, we should celebrate the resilience and determination of adults who participate despite what might seem to be adverse life circumstances. This is not to advocate a 'hands off' approach by institutions and government. As we shall see in Chapters 5 and 6, there are areas concerning guidance and finance, for instance, where at the very least additional barriers to participation ought not be created. For the moment, however, let us return to a description of some key life circumstances and the ways in which they impinged on participation.

Six key life circumstances

A range of studies on participation, including our own, has identified a number of factors affecting return to education. These factors have mostly emerged from large-scale surveys, where adults were asked fairly closed questions, requiring them to tick boxes or to identify influences on their return in order of priority. Such surveys are useful in identifying participation patterns which emerge from large sample sizes but they are usually not very helpful in explaining why particular influences are important or in describing how they operate. In-depth interviewing is one way of exploring these matters. However, it would be prohibitively expensive to conduct in-depth interviews with thousands of adults. This kind of interviewing is normally conducted with small sample sizes, in our case 50 adults, and sacrifices the goal of statistical generalizability to hoped-for insights in participation choices. Thus it is important to make clear that we are not challenging the findings of major surveys on participation. We are in no position to do so. Rather we are raising questions about the meaning of some of the key circumstances which surveys have identified as important. We hope this will help understanding of what these circumstances are and how they operate. Let us turn now to the first of these circumstances, age.

- *Age*

  A number of studies (ACACE, 1982; Munn and MacDonald, 1988; McGivney, 1990; Sargant, 1991) agree that one of the fundamental factors characterising adult students is their age. Age appears to affect the decision to participate. The majority of returners are young adults under the age of 45, whereas older adults consistently fail to return to education. Age also appears to affect choice of provision: older learners are more likely to participate in general or recreational education. Our interest was less in charting participation patterns in terms of age than in exploring with respondents whether their age had affected their participation choice and if so in what ways.

- *Gender*

  A good deal of research has been aimed at uncovering the demographics of participation, and gender has emerged in a number of studies as a determining factor in return (ACACE, 1982; Munn and MacDonald, 1988; McGivney, 1990; Sargant, 1991). Men are more likely than women to participate in work-related courses – presumably because they are more likely to be employed at the time of return – whereas women are more likely to choose recreational courses. Women with dependent children are unlikely to participate at all. We wanted to explore with respondents whether their gender had influenced participation. For example, whether men and women talked about distinctively different goals for participation and whether they referred to gender issues in discussing why they had chosen particular forms of provision or types of provider.

- *Family circumstances*

  McGivney (1990) found that women, particularly those with dependent children, fail to return to education later on. Domestic commitments were found by Lowden et al (1990) to be a basic barrier to participation, echoing the barrier of 'lack of time and money' posited in earlier research (Johnstone and Rivera, 1965; Carp, Peterson and Roelfs, 1974). Conversely, a supportive family or more general 'social approval' has been seen as an important

incentive to return (Hayes and Darkenwald, 1988). We hoped to discover how important family circumstances and commitments had been for those in our own sample.

- *Employment situation*

  Previous surveys (eg National Center for Educational Statistics, 1984) have revealed that most adult returners participate for the purpose of gaining a new job, advancing in a job already held, or for other employment reasons. Whilst full-time, professional workers are likely to participate in job-related training, Cross (1981) found that, in particular, manual workers and the poorly educated also seek educational opportunities to prepare for new jobs. Employment commitments are an important determinant in provision choices. Accordingly, we collected information on employment history to explore potential relationships between goals of participation and chosen provision with respondents' employment history.

- *School experience and post-school educational experience*

  Negative educational experience in the past has also been described as a barrier to adults' participation (Keddie, 1980; Jarvis, 1985; Woodley, 1987; Bown, 1989). This might be the result of association of one unpleasant educational experience with all others, or the low self-confidence arising from a lack of qualifications. Certainly, previous educational attainment has been shown to relate to participation choices. Those with lower educational achievement are more likely to enrol in vocational courses (Sargant, 1991) and a common reason for return is to obtain further qualifications to those already held (Cross, 1981; Kelly, 1989). We wanted to find out how school and post-school educational experience functioned as factors affecting participation. By encouraging people to talk about their time at school in a fairly open-ended way we hoped to explore the impact of this, if any, on subsequent returns to education.

By choosing to explore these six conditions in depth, we were in no way attempting to 'prove' or 'disprove' any of these findings from previous research. Rather, we used the framework they provided as a starting point for data analysis and to explore relationships between them and participation choices. We wanted to uncover their meaning and impact for respondents as an aid to answering how life circumstances affected return. This was an ambitious task and as we shall see, the same broad circumstances influenced people in different ways. We can point to the importance of family situation and employment status in affecting participation but we cannot produce a checklist of circumstances which will inevitably lead to participation or to particular kinds of participation. Life is more complicated than that.

Other factors affecting participation

Clearly an individual's life circumstances are only one cluster of influences on participation. There are many others, such as the provision of information and guidance, the admissions policies of educational providers and the availability of places in institutions which affect participation. Some of these 'supply side' factors are discussed in Chapter 5. We should also make it clear, however, that within the

confines of life circumstances, there are some which we do not discuss because of the nature of our sample. Ethnic disadvantage and physical and cognitive disabilities are cases in point. Furthermore, cultural inhibitions and social disapproval of education featured in some but not all of the interviews. We are conscious, therefore, that we have by no means exhausted all the life circumstances which may be influential for participation.

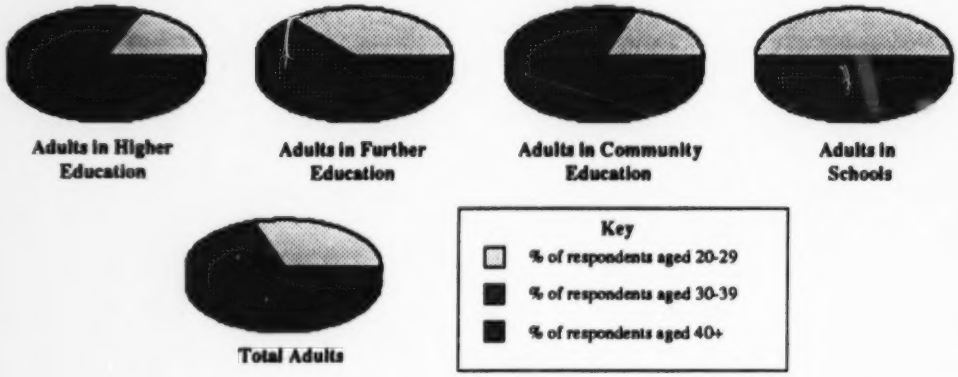
Age

Age has been identified as a factor in individuals' decision to participate in education and we were particularly interested in the ages of the adults in our sample and the effects their age appeared to have on participation choices.

We have seen that, traditionally, most returners are young adults and learners over the age of 45 are uncommon. The literature tells us that older learners generally participate in non-certificated 'leisure' courses, whilst younger adults return to realise vocational goals. Although we anticipated that the ages of the adults we interviewed might vary significantly between settings, we can make no such claim from the data. Indeed, *we found adults of all ages participating in all of the four settings and in all manner of courses and provision.* The most important message from this data is that age need not be a barrier to participation.

The following charts display the ages of the participants we interviewed, and the settings in which they were pursuing their courses. We cannot, of course, generalize from these findings. We are unable to say that these participation patterns are typical in these settings across Scotland. This spread of age amongst our respondents does, however, allow us to consider the possible role that age played in their decision-making.

Figure 4.1: The ages of respondents in different settings



The largest single group overall were aged between 30 and 39, although there were some variations in this between settings. Schools had the highest proportion of adults in their 20s: clearly, adults in our sample tended to see school as their first point of return to education. Many were concentrating upon attaining the qualifications they had failed to receive when they were 16. Higher education participants tended to be somewhat older, which might be a function of the necessary preliminary qualifications. Community education had the largest

percentage of learners over the age of 40 – as might be expected, given the stated aims of such providers. We shall return to an examination of those returners who were aged 40 or over later in this discussion. (See Appendix B for a full breakdown of participants' ages.)

For the adults in our sample, then, age appeared to affect choice of educational setting very little. Age was also unlikely to affect adults' choice of course. Thirty-year olds were as likely to participate in information technology modules as they were chemistry degrees or basic literacy. One 33-year old woman was studying Higher Anatomy, Physiology and Health – but so was another woman, aged 55! Clearly, conditions other than age were at work on adults' decision-making: it seems the *stage* adults have reached in their lives is more likely to influence return. Crossroads in adulthood might include anything from the children leaving home to redundancy to being taken along to classes by a friend — and these happen to different people at a wide variety of ages. Whilst change may be an impetus to return, the age at which these changes occur appears to matter little.

Echoed by many vocationally-oriented learners, regardless of age, was the feeling that time was somehow 'running out'. Respondents of all ages told us that a consideration when choosing to study full-time was the speedy acquisition of the final qualification – and quicker access to the labour market. Respondents' perception of their own ages and the effects this had on decision-making differed from individual to individual: one 52-year old man on a SWAP course (leading to primary teaching) was quite confident in his decision to make a drastic career move that required another four years of preparation, whilst another man, aged only 23, was determined to finish his studies as soon as possible:

> I'll be 28 before I leave university. I want something that's going to finish – it's not going to lead onto more qualifications. I want something that says, 'You are this'.

Although age may be a condition that influences participation decisions, we found no evidence that it does so in any systematic or predictable way. Age means different things to different people – and this was particularly evident with the group of older learners with whom we spoke.

Strikingly, 26% of respondents overall were aged 40 or over: the youngest participant in this group was 40, whilst the eldest was 70. We were particularly interested in these learners for two reasons. First, they belonged to a group that had been shown to be difficult to attract back into education and that is under-represented in the literature. Second, they are the target of government initiatives aimed at encouraging their return. What sorts of courses were these adults pursuing? Did they have particular reasons for returning? What had made it possible for them to return?

Traditionally, older learners participate most commonly in leisure or recreational education. The fact that many in our sample were participating in community education might, at first glance, appear to confirm this. However, a closer examination of the courses this group was following reinforces the difficulty of distinguishing between vocational or non-vocational provision. Although more than half of this

group (8 of 13) were participating for personal reasons (that is, out of enjoyment or interest), only two were involved in what might normally be considered leisure activities such as swimming, badminton, or woodwork. The other six adults were following such disparate courses as SCOTVEC computing and communications; Higher maths and APH; and degree level history and religious studies!

Most of these people told us they were participating in education purely 'for themselves' (one woman spoke of it as her 'hobby') and none had any long-term goals in mind. Why had they chosen education as a means of pursuing their interests? We wondered if there were certain conditions that had led this group to participate. It is interesting to note that all of the eight had had either positive school or post-school experiences: that is, they had enjoyed their earlier experiences of education. It seems that such positive experience may predispose individuals towards participation for leisure purposes later on: this question will be more fully addressed in the following sections on *school* and *post-school educational experiences*.

If adults over the age of 45 are difficult to attract into education, were there any clues given by the individuals in our sample as to how they had first become interested in returning? Interestingly, half of those pursuing courses for personal reasons had initially responded to outreach efforts by their current providers: although they might not have been considering return at first, contact with representatives from potential providers had impressed these individuals sufficiently to make them want to investigate participation opportunities further. In two of these cases, outreach by the provider was supplemented by support from a group of friends who went along together on the first day. The remaining four individuals had each progressed to their current course from previous participation: again, this highlights the importance of positive education experience in determining participation for leisure purposes.

In addition to these adults participating for personal reasons, five adults aged 40+ had vocational goals: this group ranged in age from 40 to 52. Why were these adults seeking to change jobs at this stage of their working lives? For three of them, the decision was a reactive one: redundancy (either personal or partner's) was forcing two people into the labour market with insufficient skills for their chosen field. One man was participating at the behest of his employer. Two women, however, aged 52 and 43, were participating for somewhat different, and less reactive, reasons. One of them was fulfilling a dream after having faced years of barriers that kept her from doing so: she was finally at an age where her children were grown and her family responsibilities were reduced, allowing her to consider her own career and her own wishes for the first time. Similarly, the second woman, bored at home now that her children were grown up, was eager to re-enter the labour market and 'get a wee job' for herself.

We wondered about the instrumental nature of these five adults' goals. Whilst the government is eager that such individuals be seen to have value in the labour market, such a view is at odds with the realities of structural unemployment endemic in Britain today. How realistic were these individuals' plans to re-enter the workforce? What would happen to them if they failed to fulfil their dream at the end of their course and secure a job in their chosen field? While this is an issue that might usefully be addressed by guidance staff at the initial stages of return, it also raises questions about the justification for encouraging older adults back into education with the expectation of finding work at the end.

Gender

The literature tells us that men most commonly return to education in order to pursue employment-related courses, whereas women tend to choose more recreational provision. We have already seen that in our data, it is very difficult to make such distinctions between vocational and non-vocational education. We guessed, however, that men and women's goals would differ: that men would tend to participate for employment reasons, whereas women would have more personal goals. *However, this hypothesis was not borne out by the data.* The women in our sample were divided equally between those whose principal goals were employment-related and those who were participating for personal reasons. Although most of the men in our sample did cite employment goals as their primary reason for returning to education, men were not exclusively employment-oriented: in addition to the four male respondents whose primary goals were personal, a number of the men in the sample also mentioned personal goals as additional benefits they hoped to obtain from their return to education.

Table 4.1: Men and women's goals

	Employment goals	*Personal goals*
Women (N = 32)	16	16
Men (N = 18)	14	4
Total (N = 50)	30	20

Many women's personal goals were, in fact, avoidance-related. Nine of the ten respondents who gave avoidance as their main reason for returning were women seeking to escape the boredom of housework or unrelieved childcare, or women who found their domestic circumstances unpleasant for one reason or another. For example, it was not simply that most women with pre-school children could only study if they could find a provider with a creche; it also appeared to be the case that the chance to leave the children in the creche – both to provide the children with nursery experience and to give the mothers a break – was one important reason why women with pre-school children attended classes.

Men, however, very rarely offered avoidance explanations: the exception was one individual in a somewhat unusual situation – a former prisoner, he had been offered the choice of returning to education or sewing mailbags. It thus appears that while women who wish to escape boredom or unpleasant circumstances at home see education as an option, men either do not have such avoidance needs, or meet them in other ways.

Family circumstances

Although gender did not appear to be a condition that helps to determine goals, men and women were not identical in the participation choices that they made. Domestic commitments are cited by previous researchers as important barriers to participation, and this was borne out in our data. In spite of all the apparent pressure towards greater sexual equality in recent decades, it seems from our sample that men and women still have – and are expected to adopt – quite stereotypical roles within the

family: men see themselves as responsible for financial support and women for material support – child care and domestic labour. These perspectives have a powerful influence on the choices people make when they return to study.

It is clear from Sally and Peter's stories that men's and women's perceptions of their family roles and responsibilities can both facilitate their return to study and create barriers for them. Sally was motivated to return because of her sense of responsibility towards her children; at the same time, she saw herself as limited in her choice of provider and provision by her child care and domestic labour commitments. Peter saw himself as responsible for the financial support of the family – and his wife clearly also felt that this should be his role. Peter's perception of his role acted both as an incentive to return to study and as a barrier: in his case, the long-term benefits had (temporarily, at least) won out against the short-term disadvantages.

Sally was married, 26 and had two pre-school children. She was studying part-time for two Highers. She chose to study at her local school because she was able to leave her children at the creche there - and she chose to study part-time because of her domestic responsibilities:

I've got an eight-month old baby and I feel she is far too young just now to leave in a creche [for too long] ... If I was here full-time, every day, I wouldn't have time for anything else like make dinners, and the house would be a mess. I have to be there when my husband comes home ... [The night I started classes] I came in and presented all my books on the coffee table. I told [my husband] what I was doing and he went off his head. There was quite a lot of arguments for the next week, and I nearly didn't come ... Now I get a lot of support from him ... I get a lot of hassle from relatives. They say, 'Oh, you've got your life and children, that should be enough for you'.

Peter, however, is *not* typical of the male respondents in our sample. Most of those with family responsibilities (a partner and children or even a partner but no children[1]) felt that their role as financial provider on a day-to-day basis must take precedence over longer-term considerations. Consequently, most male respondents in this position in our sample felt barred from taking up any type of provision which risked putting the family finances in jeopardy.

Peter had worked as a labourer on a building site but wanted to become a qualified engineer. His employer would not pay for the course, but he was awarded a grant to do a full-time OND at a college of further education. He hoped to go on from this to do a BSc:

There's been a wee bit of conflict between myself and my wife. My wife wants me to stop and get a job. It's pretty hard trying to convince her that going to get a degree is beneficial for both of us. For our future - not just me being selfish ... She thinks the man should be the breadwinner. So do I, to an extent. I should bring in the wage. For the three years, we'll be struggling to make ends meet. I think it will be worth it in the long run.

Women's perceptions of their family roles and responsibilities also created constraints, though of a different kind. In our sample of 32 women, there were only five single women without children. All the rest were mothers, the majority with children of primary school age or under.

James, married but without children, was taking a distance learning degree in psychology whilst continuing to work full-time:

I've got a full time job and I'm paying a mortgage on a house, so financially a [full- or part-time course] was out of the question.

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[1]We were surprised to discover that men appear to see themselves as responsible for the financial well-being of the family even before there are any children to take into account. There were five married men with no children in our sample, and four of them stated quite unequivocally that the need to maintain 'the family' financially (particularly in terms of paying the mortgage) was the main factor in their choice of provision. The fifth man in this group miraculously managed to study full-time while working full-time as well, a state of affairs which no doubt speaks for itself.

Without exception, these women saw themselves as primarily responsible for child care and the maintenance of the home and family life, even if they were also working. One woman in our sample continued to see herself in this role, in spite of the fact that she was studying and working part-time, while her partner was at home, having been made redundant. Consequently, *the most common reason given by women for their choice of provision was that it fitted in with their domestic commitments.* This did not mean, however, that all these women chose the same form of provision. Although most were participating part-time, three were following distance learning routes and two were on full-time courses! Clearly, different individuals develop different ways of coping with their responsibilities, and providers should not make assumptions about the sorts of provision that appeal most to women.

William was married, with three primary school children. He was studying for a distance learning degree, whilst working full-time as a systems programmer for a life assurance company.

I'd much rather study full-time, but I couldn't afford to do that. It's out of the question ... The underlying thing is that I have got to support the family. That's the number one priority. Anything that compromises that is out of the question. So I wasn't going to change jobs or get a government grant for a few years to study. That's out of the question, as well. I have to work within [my job].

Child care was the main commitment for women with pre-school children. Most of the women in this situation in our sample opted for providers with creches, and a number commented that they would not have been able to contemplate returning to education if this facility had not been available. We were surprised that there were few women with pre-school children who opted for distance learning, though one might have supposed that this mode of study would be attractive to women in this category. We speculated that one reason for the lack of take-up of distance learning might be that women with pre-school children have to make space for themselves by physically separating themselves – via the creche – from small children who would otherwise demand constant attention from their mothers. Once children had started school, however, distance learning did seem to become a more popular option, perhaps because women in this situation do have clearly delineated time away from their children.

Nevertheless, even women whose children had started at school still felt themselves to be restricted in their choice of provision by their domestic responsibilities. Indeed, a number of women on distance learning courses explained their choice by saying that housework, cooking, shopping, picking up children from school, etc, meant that they could not attend courses regularly. Similarly, respondents on part-time courses felt unable to study full-time because of their home commitments. Some older women respondents – with secondary school-aged children or grown-up children who had left home – explained that they had felt unable to return to education earlier because they felt their domestic responsibilities took priority up until the time when their children could be regarded as independent. It is important to note that the point at which women felt freed to return to study differed from person to person. For some women, the youngest child starting primary school seemed to signal such a point; for others it might be his/her starting secondary school or finishing Highers. As with age-related conditions, it seemed to be respondents' life-cycles and their view of these which determined the point of return, rather than a specific trigger point applying to everyone.

It is important to note that although respondents indicated to us that their view of their family role and responsibilities had influenced their choice of provider and provision, this did not mean that their choice was determined wholly by these factors. In particular, we found that respondents who had powerful motivations for returning to education were able to overcome barriers which, for others, seemed insurmountable. This emerged very clearly from the information provided by the two lone parents we interviewed, Claire (whose situation was discussed in Chapter 2) and Christine.

Christine was 21, with two children aged four and two. She hated school and left without qualifications. At the time we spoke to her, she was studying basic English and maths, and a modular computer course at her local school. She would have liked to go to FE college, but was prevented by the lack of creche provision. Both her children attended the nursery at the school:

People that I went to school with they're still like I am, but they're not back at school, so they're not going to have a career to fall back on, and that's all I wanted ... If I don't, then I'm just going to be like I am for the rest of my life and I don't want to be like that.

Lone parents have to take on the roles both of financial and material providers for the family. They are responsible for child care and do not have partners who can take over the burden, even for a short time, and they also have the financial responsibility of maintaining the family. One would therefore suppose that it is doubly difficult for lone parents, particularly those with pre-school children, to contemplate returning to education. Nevertheless, these two women demonstrated the fact that the determination of the individual can overcome the most negative of circumstances.

Employment situation

A further condition about which we asked respondents was their employment history. Certainly, employment goals have been put forward in past studies as the most common for returners, and we have seen how this was the case in our own sample. Although we found that previous employment could *not* be used as a condition by which to predict participation, it was apparent that adults' current employment situations had an important bearing not only upon their reasons for return, but upon their choices of provision as well.

Adults with jobs had to accommodate them by choosing a suitable form of provision. As we have seen in our discussions of age and family circumstances, however, the same conditions experienced by different people can lead to a wide variety of choices. This was also true of employment: for example, individuals who were employed full-time were most likely to choose part-time or distance learning courses. Often, the goals of those in employment were mixed. Whilst many were participating for employment reasons (particularly as a means of gaining enhanced pay or status) personal reasons could play a part as well (often as a 'hobby' or 'something different' from work). Those with full-time jobs juggled study and employment in different ways, to suit their personal circumstances.

The table below shows the employment situations of those with whom we spoke; again, we are not arguing that this is representative of adults participating in education, generally.

Table 4.2: Respondents' employment situation at the time of interview

	number of respondents (n = 50)
unemployed	19
employed full-time	11
caring for family at home	10
employed part-time	9
retired	1

The single largest subset of the sample were unemployed at the time we spoke to them: these included people who had never worked, people who had been made redundant, women with children who were seeking work but unable to find it, individuals between jobs, and individuals who had left work in order to take up a full-time course. In most cases, these individuals were participating in order to prepare themselves for work (often an unspecified job) or a change of field. Interestingly, none of the unemployed people with whom we spoke was participating in an unemployment training scheme.

Many of the long-term unemployed in our sample were intent on making a career 'launch' and their participation goals were often mixed. Most of these individuals wanted to find work at the end of the course, but bound up in this were also ideas of self worth and social advancement. 'Education is the only way out' was a refrain that has already been discussed in the chapter on *goals*. Often, these adults had no particular job in mind. One woman who had spent a number of years at home told us, 'I'm still not sure what I want to be ... I want something that pays a reasonable amount, that's relatively easy, with a pension.' Inherent in this intention to 'find a job' was the belief that education qualifications of any description would be of help in the labour market, and that decisions about particular jobs could be made closer to the time. Another group participating in order to prepare themselves for a career launch were women who had spent time caring for families at home – and whose skills and credibility with employers were felt to have been eroded as a result. Education for them was most often seen as a personal endeavour, and goals were likely to be associated with self-realisation and the building of confidence.

We also spoke to people who were intending to make a career change: for adults who had been made redundant or were between jobs, employment-only goals were more common. Many of these individuals (most of whom were men) were in real financial difficulty due to lack of work. For this group, education was seen as a way of breaking into new fields with better prospects. For many in this group, participation was already affecting employment, as they were obliged to find part-time work tending bar or driving taxis a few nights a week purely in order to supplement grants or to help pay additional course expenses.

We now turn away from the circumstances of adults' lives to two conditions that relate closely to their image of themselves and their relationship with education: the experiences of our sample in school, and in courses previous to the ones in which they were participating at the time of interview.

School experience

The literature suggested to us that negative educational experience, particularly at school, acts as a barrier to participation later on. Our analysis of the data challenged this idea: of our own sample, just over half (27 adults) had disliked school. *We concluded that negative school experience in itself is not sufficient to deter adults from returning to education.* What seemed to be important was whether negative school experience had dented individuals' sense of worth or ability. It was striking that for almost all those who reported a bad time at school, this was seen as due to circumstances outside their control. A failure to achieve qualifications – one indicator of school experience – for example, was often ascribed to prolonged absence from school due to illness or family circumstances, such as parents separating, which affected the ability to study.

We asked respondents to describe their time at school to us and were surprised by the vividness with which they recounted their experiences. Many who had disliked school talked at length about the difficulties and conflicts that had marred their school days. Some common reasons for a negative experience emerged: 'teachers', that is, either conflict with one or more teachers in particular or general difficulties with authority and discipline; disapproval or inability to 'fit in' to the ethos of the school (this was particularly true of 'traditional' or academic cultures); illness or disablement to the extent that attendance at school was difficult for long periods of time; family turbulence that had made achievement difficult; lack of guidance; laziness; and perceived irrelevance of the curriculum.

What struck us about these stated reasons for a negative experience was that they were all either external (such as teachers or curriculum) or related to conscious decisions not to achieve (disapproval of ethos or laziness). Whilst some respondents suffered a blow to their confidence by not achieving qualifications, none had their self-esteem irrevocably destroyed by their time at school. We felt this was an important key in the decision to return.

If negative experience at school was not an insurmountable barrier to return, we wondered if it might affect participation choices in other ways. Examination of the data, however, revealed no patterns related to school experience and choice of provision. In further education, for example, ten of the 14 participants had disliked school, though half had left with qualifications. These ten were evenly spread across part-time, full-time and distance learning. Perhaps the conscious desire to return to education counter-balanced nervousness about returning full-time – or perhaps the nervousness did not exist because lack of confidence or actual subject difficulty had not been factors in the negative experience and qualifications had actually been obtained. Three of the those with negative school experience and no school qualifications were also in full-time provision, never having considered the alternatives. Did they have an unconscious desire to 'make up for lost time'? Three others with negative experience and no qualifications were participating in part-time or SWAP courses – and they gave 'easing back into the system' as the reason for their choice of provision. These were the only adults in this group for whom negative experience in the past resulted in a certain hesitancy with respect to their current courses.

Six of the higher education students had disliked school – but they had also returned to education previously in order to pursue Highers, modules, and Standard

Grade or leisure courses. All of these experiences had been positive ones. Perhaps for this group, post-school education was a more important determinant than school in affecting subsequent participation. We shall examine the role of further education in the following section of this chapter, *post-school education*.

Most of the higher education students with whom we spoke had had either a positive or mixed school experience – this was the only setting in which this was the case – and had left school with qualifications, mostly at Higher level. All of these adults had in common the belief that participation in a degree course (as opposed to leisure, or more school-orientated courses) would be beneficial for the realization of both employment and personal goals. These were people seeking an 'intellectual challenge' as well as qualifications. So, positive experience might well breed positive experience and confidence to do more. We shall return to this possibility, too, in our discussion of *post-school education*.

Whether or not an individual had enjoyed school, or reflected upon it as a 'positive' experience, however, was not necessarily a predictor of whether or not that person had left with qualifications. Many in the sample, whilst stating they had 'disliked school' or found it 'boring' nonetheless had gained qualifications before leaving. Although there is little or no correlation between school experience and later provision choices, we have already suggested that there is a direct relationship between the qualifications received upon leaving school and future provision. The leaving ages of the adults we interviewed, as well as the qualifications they received, are shown below.

Table 4.3: School leaving age

Age	*Number of respondents (n = 50)*
16 or under	27
17	8
18	5

Table 4.4: Qualifications received

Qualifications	*Number of respondents (n = 50)*
No qualifications	23
O-grades only	13
O-grades and Highers	11
Lower leaving certificate	3

Most of the 50 participants with whom we spoke had left school aged 15 or 16. They were almost evenly divided between those leaving school with qualifications and those leaving without. Clearly, there is a correlation between leaving age and qualifications received: most of those leaving at 16 received at least one O-grade, whilst most of those leaving at 17 or 18 received at least one Higher.

The qualifications adults already held dictated, for the most part, the setting in which they chose to return and the qualifications they felt they required. Individuals tended to participate at a level consistent with quite traditional notions of progression: those without qualifications generally seeking Standard Grades or SCOTVEC modules at school; those with Standard Grades seeking Highers at school or college; those with Highers seeking degrees at university, and so on. We found very few individuals progressing in more innovative ways: of the 16 higher education participants, for example, none had progressed through formal access courses, and only two had come through the OND/HND route. The adults with whom we spoke

still felt it necessary to obtain the qualifications they had 'missed out on' earlier.

But how do adults come to see the necessity of qualifications? What happens to make them value education in the years after they leave school? The data suggest a number of reasons. Respondents talked about 'maturity' and 'experience', which revealed the importance of school qualifications – particularly in the job market. Implicit in many of the further education interviews, for instance, was the notion that participation in modules was 'making up' for gaps in schooling – that is, that employment depends on school achievement, so unsuccessful schooling must somehow be 'remedied'. Whilst as teenagers, respondents' most important concern had been to 'get out and get a job', adulthood brought with it the realisation that long-term goals and planning for the future were important considerations – particularly when respondents had children, themselves.

Morag left school at 16 and held a number of unskilled factory jobs:

I had wasted my time in school ... At that age, you don't get along with a lot of the teachers .... You are too young to know what you want to do ... I started in the first factory - and you hear about all the bad things that happen there - and I moved from one to the next, and I thought, 'Factories seem the only thing I'm going to do here'. I didn't like [any of the] jobs - really boring, repetitive - and because of lack of qualifications I couldn't really get anything else, and that's what made me really decide to get out and do something.

Children emerged as an important factor in this process of 'learning to value education'. We have seen that goals related to social advancement often included reference to the responsibility of providing a better life for children. Researchers at the Centre for Educational Sociology at Edinburgh University have found that one of the most important determinants of a child's participating in schooling beyond the statutory leaving age is the qualifications held by his/her mother – and this was echoed in the interviews we conducted. Fathers, too, were concerned that their children take advantage of schooling in a way they had failed to do when they were young. One father of a nine-year old girl told us:

> I am a big fan of education, now. Like my wee girl, I make sure she sticks in at school. It's very important to me now. If somebody had pointed that out to me when I was younger, I wouldn't have been in jail for years, just doing crazy things ...

While this sentiment was repeated many times by many different people, it was usually accompanied by a shake of the head and a variant on the following lamentation from a mother of two:

> Now I wish I'd done a bit more at school. I keep telling the kids that – but they'll be the same!

Post-school education

The final condition in which we were interested was the possible experience of adult returners in non-advanced further education previous to their current course. Forty of the 50 respondents had had some encounter with education since leaving school. Of these, just over half (22) reported that the experience had been a positive one. Twelve adults had disliked their courses, and five were ambivalent. We were struck by the finding that *where experience was positive, it was more important in determining*

future participation than school experience – particularly where respondents had disliked school. *But even negative experiences in education after leaving school could have beneficial results.* We will examine these two main groups of adults, those with positive and those with negative experiences, in turn.

For many adults who enjoyed their initial return to education after leaving school, personal maturity and motivation had been an important factor in their success. Adults told us how the voluntary nature of adult education engendered an enthusiasm to learn – and a sympathy with the teachers! This was in direct contrast to their earlier reluctance to participate in school, and the accompanying mistrust of teachers as figures of authority. Individuals who had disliked school often found a friendly reception in adult classes and appreciated the co-operative atmosphere that resulted.

Keith had gone back to do Highers at college after leaving school with no qualifications:

When I went back to college the first time to do my Highers, I was amazed that education could be like that. I suppose I felt let down by the people at school ... It was different altogether. You were treated like an adult. There wasn't that relationship of power and powerlessness - and the people that were teaching you were on equal footing with you. That was a real revelation.

Liz did an Open University course in child care after spending eight years at home with her children:

I really enjoyed it. I felt quite proud of myself, which was something I hadn't been feeling for a long time. That was the first step. I decided I wasn't going to leave it at that.

Alison left school without qualifications and had spent most of adult life at home caring for children:

My husband bought a computer, and it drove me mad because he was sitting at the thing all the time, and I thought, 'I'm going to go find out what's so fascinating'. And I actually hated computers, but I loved the course. And I loved being out with these people, and I thought, 'This is wonderful, I'm going to do another subject' ... I just loved learning again. It was just super and [progression] seemed the natural thing.

The outcomes of such positive participation varied. For some, it engendered a new confidence. For 11 adults in our sample, initial participation was so successful it resulted in progression to the current course (this will be explored more fully in Chapter 7). Others had seen the experience as helpful to their careers.

Reasons for a negative experience differed greatly. The most common reason had to do with external expectations and outside pressure to make inappropriate choices. Other respondents felt their post-school training had been irrelevant to their needs at the time. Inappropriateness – that is, a course that was too demanding or too difficult – was also a problem for some people. Still others found their courses to be unsuited to their personal circumstances, either in terms of expense or time. Some adults – particularly those following distance learning programmes – had felt isolated and unfulfilled. Others had not been able to fit into the culture of the provider. We were interested in the nature of these difficulties: as in the school data, problems were generally stated to have stemmed from other people or from the courses themselves – not from respondents' personal failings.

James left school with six Highers, and quit his university course in electrical engineering after one year:

My dad had worked in the building trade all his life, and the last thing he wanted his son to be was a bricklayer ... The [careers officer at school] had a look at the O-levels I had and at the Highers I was doing at the time, and matched them up and said I could go on and do electronics. And before I could say, 'What's that all about?' my old man said, 'Yeah, that's a great idea!' And I didn't know enough about the world or my options to say what I wanted to do ... I couldn't cope with it.

We were struck by the fact that negative experiences of post-school education provision could help crystallise future choices for those determined to return.

Jean's inability to 'fit in' at college, for example, contributed to her decision to pursue subsequent courses on a distance learning basis – a learning method that she felt was proving successful. Similarly, another individual who, as a young undergraduate, had disliked the ethos of a traditional Scottish university had returned to pursue his studies at a technical college because such providers 'have a reputation of being more down to earth'. He, too, never regretted this decision. Unsuccessful participation, then, can have positive outcomes – but only if the desire to return is not dimmed by the experience. Other conditions and goals, particularly employment goals, seem to over-ride negative education experiences to spur return.

As had been the case with school experience, the qualifications and type of training received during such return helped to determine the nature of subsequent participation, whether the experience was positive or negative. A breakdown of respondents' *most recent* participation prior to their current course appears below:

Bruce left school and became a hairdresser. He felt the vocational course he had taken had been irrelevant:

They wanted anatomy, physiology, and trichology. When I think back now - physics is [still horrendous] to me today - I thought, 'My God, if you want me to learn this, you'll have me coming out qualified as a doctor!' I mean, a customer comes in for a shampoo and set, what do I want to know about anatomy and physiology? I thought, 'That's not for me ...'

Jean had done a college course after leaving school, but felt alienated from the culture of the provider:

When I was at college, I didn't seem to get on with as many people as what I had when I was at school. It was really funny. I think it's because the girls in my class - well - they were just not like me. I mean, sort of upper class, compared to me. I had one friend, and that was it. I don't miss that at all.

Madge left school without qualifications, and had attempted to return to education only once before:

Because you don't have these qualifications from school, you just automatically assume, 'I've no qualification, I cannae do it'. That's why I tried really hard to find some kind of course where you could go and get pre-educated. The only place I found was a wee place in [the city]. And that was more humiliating than anything ... The people there couldn't even spell their names. This gave me a negative feeling, and I was getting more and more like, 'I don't think I can take any more of this'. I was looking for a class of adults about my own age group who were capable like me but didn't know how capable they were.

Table 4.5: Adults' previous participation

Course	*number of participants (n = 50)*
school subjects or modular courses	15
job related training*	13
no previous experience	10
ONC/OND or HNC/HND courses	5
leisure classes	3
participants in adult basic education	2
unfinished university degree courses	2

*includes YTS, employer-based training, in-service and employer-funded training at college

Job-related training, ONC/HNC courses or university degree courses (finished or unfinished) were the most common types of previous participation amongst higher education students. Previous participants in school subjects or modules were the single biggest group of returners to further education. A hierarchy of progression emerged in the data: individuals often returned to do more basic qualifications at college (even if they had left school with O-grades, or O-grades and Highers) as a first

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step. If this first step proved to be a successful one (or if positive lessons could be drawn from an unsuccessful experience) progression resulted – even if progression was not the original intention of return – if more pressing employment goals did not supersede the desire to continue in education. This theme will be more fully discussed in Chapter 7. But what of those who had not returned to education before?

We were surprised to discover that only ten of the respondents had had no experience of post-school education prior to their current participation. We felt this was a particularly significant group, because we had been able to 'catch' its members in their first forays back into education. We hypothesized that they might have unique reasons for returning, and made similar choices about their participation.

Two settings appeared to attract first-time returners: half of those to whom we spoke were attending classes in school, whilst most of the others were involved in community education. Clearly, these two settings were seen as the most appealing options by which to 'test the waters' of education after unsuccessful schooling. In fact, only one of the ten had had a wholly positive time at school – and she returned to do a university course after 18 years' absence from education! We have noted before the tendency for positive experience to breed progression. Choice of setting was also a function of the qualifications possessed by this group: all eight in schools and community education had left school without them.

In other respects, the ten appeared to have little in common. Their ages ranged from 21 to 70. Their employment histories varied greatly: two had never worked, whilst others held full-time jobs. They had different goals ranging from personal interest and enjoyment to employment. They were pursuing a wide range of courses, from swimming classes and woodwork to a degree in education. Some of the adults had taken the decision to return on their own, whilst others had initially gone along with friends.

What most of them seemed to have in common was the fact that they were totally fed up with their situation: the fact that they couldn't read properly, or couldn't stand being in the house any longer, or hated their current job. Most of them did not drift back into education – they saw education as a way of solving their problems, because these problems were seen to arise from the limitations of having no qualifications. This was not true for three of the women in this group (two of whom were over the age of 60) for whom education was seen as a social pursuit, and who had initially participated with a group of friends.

Summary

We have seen that various conditions operated in different ways on individuals' lives and their decisions to return. Conditions, although common to everyone, varied in their quality and importance from individual to individual. Conditions could act as incentives to return or as barriers to be overcome. Some conditions proved more important than others in determining goals and participation choices. From our data, we concluded that:

- age is not a barrier to participation, nor is it a useful predictor of participation choices;

- there was no difference between men's and women's goals: each were as likely to report employment goals as personal goals, although women often saw wider benefits accruing from education;
- men and women's roles within their families greatly influenced their choice of provision: whilst men saw their main function as providing financial support, women were more often responsible for child care and other domestic duties – and provision needed to accommodate these;
- many adults juggle extensive employment and educational responsibilities, and employment goals are vital in determining return;
- negative school experience is not a barrier to participation, although the qualifications received at school are important in determining the qualifications sought later on;
- post-school educational experience often leads to further progression whether this experience is positive or negative.

5 Making choices?

So far we have looked at both adults' purposes in returning to education and the ways in which their life circumstances affected this return. The decision to participate, however, was only the first step in the process of re-entry to learning. After deciding to participate, what did adults do next? How did they go about determining the most appropriate setting for their return? For example, what led some adults to choose one college or school over another? What influenced the choice of full-time education for some individuals, while others chose different forms of provision?

In this chapter on making choices, we first consider the most dominant reasons for adults' choice of provider and provision. We then go on to examine the role that guidance played in these choices, and adults' views of the advice they received. We consider guidance from two angles: the help and support provided by family and friends (informal guidance) and the information supplied by providers and other official sources (formal guidance).

Choosing the setting for return

In interview, we sought to discover adults' reasons for deciding upon particular providers and forms of provision. We did not present respondents with a list of possible reasons, nor did we prompt them for likely responses. In this way, we hoped to gain as honest a picture as possible of the processes through which these adults went when making their choices. We were also interested in discovering whether or not they had had any knowledge of alternatives and, if so, why these had been discarded.

We were intrigued that, given this lack of interviewer guidance, most adults had very similar reasons for making the choices that they did – even though these choices varied greatly from individual to individual. One of the most striking features that emerged from analysis of this data was that of 50 respondents, 35 knew of or considered only the provider to which they had ultimately returned. In other words, when deciding where to study, *35 adults had no choice*. This was because they were limited either by their personal circumstances or by their lack of knowledge of alternatives – and often, by both. We examine each of these situations more fully, below, in our discussion of provision and provider choices.

Choice of provision

Adults' reasons for choosing particular forms of provision reflected their need to accommodate the many different responsibilities of their lives. As we shall see in Chapter 6, education was generally perceived as less pressing than adults' other concerns. The most common reason given for choice of either full-time, part-time or distance learning, for example, was that it fitted in with other commitments. These commitments varied from individual to individual, of course, and could be employment or family-related. Interestingly, this did not cause respondents to choose one predominant form of provision: of the 26 adults who gave 'fitting in with

other commitments' as the main reason for choosing the type of course they would follow, 18 chose part-time and six chose distance learning. Two individuals even chose to do full-time courses! We will discuss the benefits and disadvantages adults perceived in these different routes in the following chapter – but as we suggested earlier, adults adopted many different strategies for coping with their complex lives. Other demands were often so great that adults did not even consider forms of provision that would not accommodate them. This was also reflected in the fact that seven adults chose provision that was inexpensive and would not place too great a financial burden on them and/or the rest of the family. This was a vain attempt, unfortunately, and we will discuss the expense of return in Chapter 6.

The most common reasons for respondents' choice of provision are given, below. Not everyone was able to articulate why s/he had chosen a particular form of provision.

Table 5.1: Reasons for choice of provision

reason	*no. of respondents*	*broken down by provision chosen**		
fits in with other commitments	26	2 FT	18 PT	6 DL
alternative not considered	7	5 FT	2 PT	
financial reasons	7	2 FT	3 PT	2 DL
No choice: nominated by employer	3			3 DL

*FT denotes full-time provision; PT denotes part-time provision; and DL denotes distance learning

Additional reasons were given by one or two respondents: 'easing back' into education (where full-time courses were seen to be too demanding); disability making full-time provision impossible; and having no alternative (because, for example, the desired course was only offered on either a part-time or a full-time basis). Of course, in schools and community education, adults often had no real choice – particularly if they were following one course only or if the provider offered only a drop-in facility. Nonetheless, one woman was attending school classes on a full-time basis in order to pass as many Standard Grade exams as possible within one year. Indeed, full-time provision was often seen as a 'sacrifice' or investment in the future and undertaken usually to save time or when other commitments did not interfere too much (this was particularly true of older women who were supported by their husbands and whose children had left home). Mostly, though, adults' provision choice was dictated by personal circumstances – and it is debatable how far respondents felt they really had a 'choice' at all.

Choice of provider

A far more significant decision, it seemed to us, was adults' choice of provider, rather than their choice of provision. This was because, in most cases, the provider was chosen *first*. Most respondents chose a provider to fit in with their circumstances – and then selected from the courses available there – rather than deciding first what they wanted to do and then looking for suitable providers where such courses might be found.

In interview, most adults were able to describe at least one reason for their choice of provider. Usually, these reasons were related to the convenience of providers' locations, or the attractiveness of the courses they offered. When we asked respondents about the ways in which they had investigated their options and the other providers of which they were aware, however, a hidden reason for provider choice emerged. Thirty-five of the adults to whom we spoke had known of the existence of only one provider – that to which they had returned. Although 15 individuals were aware of more than one, the extent and accuracy of their knowledge varied greatly, and three of these adults did not act upon this knowledge at all. Although we were somewhat surprised by this finding, it is reflected in the literature. Munn and MacDonald (1988) found that 25% of adults in Scotland (returners and non-returners) were unable to name even one provider of adult education, and 21% were unaware of any adult education opportunities whatsoever. Considering that our sample consisted entirely of participants in adult education, we had hoped that knowledge about opportunities would be greater.

We cannot underestimate the importance of this finding. Although survey responses may throw up positive, rational reasons for choices (as our respondents were able to do) confusion and ignorance often underlies them. People can generate reasons, but often they are not the *real* reasons. Of the eight adults who said they chose their provider because of the course it offered, for example, only three could identify other providers offering similar courses. The remaining five maintained there were no possible alternatives. This seemed unlikely in all these cases, particularly as the courses being followed were quite conventional arts and science modules. We thought it strange, for example, that one man had chosen the college he was attending because he 'wanted to do a biology [module] and nobody else catered for that.' It seemed to us that in these cases, as in most, the positive reason given for provider choice concealed a lack of awareness of possible alternatives.

The single most common reason given for adults' choice of provider was that its location was conveniently placed from home. This was the case in all settings. Not one of our respondents had moved away from home to participate, or travelled any great distance to do so. While we expected this to be true in schools and community education, where providers' remit is a local one, such was also the case in higher education. The only adults in higher education who lived at distances from their providers chose to follow distance learning courses rather than uproot themselves or their families. This is not so surprising, given the immobility of adults with family and employment responsibilities. Often, too, adults chose their nearest provider because they were aware of no other. Of the 16 adults who chose their provider because it was 'nearest to home', ten did not actually know of any other.

This was also true of adults who had previous experience of their providers, or were recommended them by friends and relatives – two additional reasons given for choosing providers. Three adults, nominated by their employer to do a professional qualification also had no choice. If they wanted to pursue the course (paid for by their employer) they were required both to enrol with a particular provider and pursue a particular form of provision (in these cases, distance learning). The following table represents the most common *stated* reasons for respondents' choice of provider.

Table 5.2: Adults' stated reasons for their choice of provider

reason	*number of respondents*
convenient location	16
attractive course	8
already knew students there	7
previous experience of provider	5
offered useful facilities	5
nominated by employer	3

Additional reasons for provider choice were cited by only a few people. Two individuals had heard about their course by 'word of mouth' – one had discovered her local school offered courses for adults through a casual conversation with a stranger on a bus! Two adults chose their providers because they were inexpensive, and a further two were attracted by advertising in free papers. Again, *inherent in 35 cases was a lack of knowledge of alternatives, and therefore a lack of choice.*This choice 'by default' for so many individuals has important implications to which we shall return in our discussion of guidance, later in this chapter.

We also felt it was important that, in all but a very few cases, adults chose providers for structural reasons such as convenience, rather than cultural reasons such as atmosphere. Providers can do nothing about these structural factors in the hopes of attracting more adults. They cannot change their location, for example. They can, however, ensure that their position in the local community is a high profile one – advertising and outreach are two important ways in which this can be accomplished. It seemed to us that adults were desperate to find somewhere local to do their courses, and we will discuss later in this chapter how this could lead adults to follow inappropriate courses at local colleges. Adults were willing to consider any providers about which they had heard. Getting the news of existence across to potential local returners is very important.

We are not implying in our discussion of lack of choice that adults regretted their decisions later on: as we shall see in the next chapter, almost all of the returners with whom we spoke were satisfied with their providers and their courses. Yet one woman told us, 'I can't really compare it because I've never been anywhere else – so it's all new to me.' Another man said, 'I don't know about education. I don't know about advantages and disadvantages of colleges – a college is a college to me.' How far is this ignorance a necessary condition for first-time returners? How far can guidance help adults weigh possible advantages and disadvantages of which they have no personal experience? It is to this issue of guidance that we now turn.

Guidance

It is well-documented that a major difficulty facing adult returners is knowing where and how to get information (Alexander and Steward, 1988; Hillier, 1990; Howieson, 1991). In some respects, it can be said that guidance is usually sought by those who require it least. Holloway (1987), for example, found that most users of guidance

services were under the age of 35, from higher socio-economic groups, and already holding more educational qualifications than non-users. Eagleson (1991) mirrored this by pointing out that:

> some adults, particularly those seeking education or training for the first time since leaving school, have no clear idea of either their own skills or capacities or the opportunities available to them. (p 275)

How can formal guidance services make it easier for adults to find the necessary information?

Brown (1991) posits that the function of guidance is to help adults clarify their options. It does this by carrying out seven activities: informing; advising; counselling; assessing; enabling; advocating; and feeding back. These seven activities should be informed by five values: client-centredness; confidentiality; accessibility; independence; and free availability. How consistent with these aims was the guidance our respondents received? Did it enable them to clarify their options and make choices?

Unfortunately, the adults in our sample often had no choice because they only knew about one prospective provider. Sometimes, it was this knowledge that led to participation in the first place rather than any particular goal, as we suggested in Chapter 4. But from where did adults obtain even this most basic information? Sometimes, it was serendipitous, as the example of the woman on the bus demonstrates. We were struck by the importance of such informal information to all respondents, who often relied on their own, pre-existing knowledge and that of relatives and friends – who might or might not have had experience of education themselves.

Over half the adults with whom we spoke (30 in total) reported that they consulted family and friends *instead of* more official guidance sources in the early stages of return. Why was this the case? One important reason was that, quite simply, respondents did not know where to begin looking for information. It also seemed to us that in these early stages of decision-making, adults did not wish to talk to or confide in strangers. The decision to return was felt to be a highly personal one, and not one into which disinterested, third parties might have useful input. Adults preferred to discuss these issues (if they wanted to discuss them at all) with trusted, familiar people who could listen and give advice knowing a good deal about the prospective student's background and circumstances. Adults often felt the *only* alternative to personal knowledge was that of family and friends.

Friends and relatives were often more important than formal guidance services:

There wasn't any one person you could go to and they could say, 'This would enhance your career' or 'This would enhance your chances of getting on that course.' My husband and I just discussed it ourselves, and read through the papers and talked to people who'd been on the courses before and what they'd found ... If you don't know people, it can be difficult to know what to do for the best.

Individuals with no such personal contacts, or who were unwilling to discuss their return with anyone, were at a real disadvantage when it came to finding out about learning opportunities. Often, they went round in circles before fortuitously stumbling upon an appropriate, formal source of help. Several respondents lamented

the amount of money they had spent on 'phone calls before eventually finding someone able to give them the information they sought. The woman in this example finally ended up at her local further education college in order to pursue basic language skills. She was unhappy there because of the impersonal atmosphere and feared she would not complete her course satisfactorily. We could but speculate as to how much happier she would have been at a community education provider – but the college offered the only opportunity she had been able to find. How many potential returners give up before they locate even one prospective provider, too frustrated to continue?

Information was difficult to find if adults did not know where to begin looking:

There's no proper advertisement or anything. You can't pick up the Yellow Pages and find the place that says adult education. There's no sources for people like me who all the years have desperately wanted to face my big fear and get educated ... I started off in the Yellow Pages and everything that said education department I rang and tried to explain ... I just got mucked around from one person to the next. Nobody knew anything. Spent my money on the telephone bill.

Of course, not all respondents were unable to locate formal sources of guidance to help them find out about the opportunities open to them. Eight of the 50 adults to whom we spoke had taken proactive steps to identify possible providers through the use of 'official' channels. Of these, two had visited their local Job Centre; two had asked tutors from previous courses; one had approached a teacher at her daughter's school; one had talked to the nursing college where she eventually hoped to enrol; and one had asked advice of his manager at work.

Even where such proactive steps were taken, however, adults were generally satisfied if they received the name of one provider. They were fortunate if it turned out to be suitable. One woman, for example, had been recommended a local further education college as a possibility for the qualifications she required to obtain admittance to nursing college. The college offered to 'put together a package' of full-time courses that would cost seven hundred pounds. Unaware of any alternatives, she agreed to their plan and took out a bank loan to cover the fees. Then, several days later, she received through the post literature about another college, containing information about distance learning opportunities. Reading this, she discovered that she could do the same courses for half the price. She duly enroled in the second college. Where did this information come from? She told us, 'I have no idea to this day'. The important point to this story is that, despite the fact she had originally sought out guidance (in this case, from her daughter's school), she never really made an informed decision. Instead, she reacted to the information that she happened to be given. We found this situation to be a distressingly common one.

Indeed, the rest of the adults who had found out about their providers through 'official' sources did so in a wholly reactive fashion: through advertising; from employers (where courses were employer-led); or through outreach. In all these cases, one provider and only one was investigated. This still left 30 adults who relied upon either their own knowledge or that of friends for the identification of possible providers – again, with little in the way of choice as a result.

What of adults whose goals required them to take certain kinds of courses, or gain certain kinds of qualifications? For these individuals, the process of choosing could generally be broken down into two stages: finding about the existence of one or more providers; then determining which was suitable. In our sample of 50 adults, only nine actually investigated more than one provider by sending for prospectuses or

attending open days. Usually, the discovery of a provider near to home was sufficient to end the search. However, where adults did investigate their options more widely, other conditions such as course suitability, atmosphere, and facilities were likely to come into play as secondary considerations. This was the case, however, for only a very few individuals.

But whether adults were interested in one provider or many, they still had to approach it for the first time. How did they go about doing this?

Approaching Providers

Initial contact with providers was made in a variety of ways, and was generally related to the type of information still required. These methods of approach are outlined below, the most common being simply sending away or 'phoning for prospectuses or other forms of written information. In three cases, it was unclear how individuals had first contacted their providers.

Table 5.3: Adults' first contact with their providers

Method of contact	*number of respondents (n = 47)*
Sending/phoning for a prospectus	24
Interview	10
Through employer (on employer-led course)	5
Attending open day	4
No contact made before enrolment	4

Interestingly, many adults made little or no personal contact with providers' guidance or teaching staff before enroling. We found this curious, as most adults who *did* make personal contact found it invaluable for helping to clarify options. Of course, respondents had different reasons for contacting providers, and they did not always feel that personal contact was necessary. Three types of guidance emerged as important to adult returners: *information* (to establish the nature of possible courses that might be suitable); *advice* (as to which courses they should take and at what level they should study); and *support* (to encourage and strengthen their resolve to return to education). Adults might seek only one type of guidance, or a combination. We discuss each of these types of guidance more fully, below.

Personal contact with the provider was important for adults re-entering education for the first time:

If I'd seen the prospectus, I don't think I would have done this course. I think I would have thought, 'Can't do this, can't do that'. The fact that I phoned up and somebody spoke to me and said, 'You can do this' - if I'd seen it written down in black and white I don't know I would have done it. I think I would have thought, 'I can't cope with this. I'm too old.'

Information was by far the commonest type of guidance which respondents sought. People wanted to know what courses providers offered, what the content of the courses was and what sorts of qualifications were required. Sources of funding for courses was also an important issue. Adults were equally likely to seek – and receive – information in all four educational settings. Of course, information was the simplest form of guidance providers could provide: respondents were

generally content with a prospectus and helpful office staff who could answer queries over the 'phone. Adults seeking information only were unlikely to make personal contact with potential providers, relying instead upon written materials and glossy brochures.

Respondents who sought *advice* were somewhat more demanding of providers' guidance services. These adults often thought that they did not have the skills or background knowledge necessary to interpret the information available. They perhaps had less experience of the education system or had not been in contact with the system for some time. They might have wanted to train for a career in a new or different field but were unsure of exactly what qualifications would be required or what the best route might be. Others had a vaguer notion still of 'getting an education' without very specific ideas of what this might involve. These respondents wanted to know whether the courses available were appropriate for the purposes for which they were thinking of returning to study (however specific or vague these might be), at what level they should study, and what sorts of courses to fit together to make an appropriate 'package' for potential employers or future study plans.

Again, respondents were equally likely to seek such advice in all four educational settings. However, they were least likely to receive it in higher and further education colleges. We were surprised by the lack of personal contact reported by returners in these settings, and by the fact that only ten adults in all were interviewed by their provider before enroling. Interviews were felt to be an important part of getting to know a provider and what it offered – particularly by those who failed to have one! Not everyone who was interviewed had found the experience to be helpful, however. Adults felt the purpose of the interview should be a mutual exploration of issues and interests, rather than a competitive assessment of respondents' abilities. Interviews were seen as a useful opportunity for obtaining advice, and we were surprised by the number of individuals who, like the woman in the first example here, felt that an interview was a 'privilege' granted only to the lucky few.

Interviews were vital in ensuring personal contact in the early stages of return:

Colleges too often don't give you the correct information. The information you get is sparse, unless you're allowed to have a full interview. I've spent more than £35 on 'phone calls. You can't make an informed decision.

Nobody sat down and gave me a test and said, 'Right, you're that level in English' ... Why can't they do it in simple words? The system ... frightens you quite a lot.

Though the nature of the interview was important in determining its sucess:

The interview was intimidating. Whether it was meant to be that way, I have no idea. Support is not a word I would use for that particular day.

Often the students who sought advice were also looking for *support* from the institution. Students who lacked confidence needed not only to be told what was appropriate for them but also to be convinced that they could do what was suggested, and encouraged to return to education. Some of our respondents, as we have seen in the last chapter, faced psychological barriers of their own making or of others'. Mothers of pre-school children, for example, needed to convince themselves and others that returning to education did not mean that they were neglecting their children. Older students sometimes felt that their age might be a social or learning barrier. Some simply found the bureaucracy of enrolment daunting, and needed to be supported at that time. Adults in schools and community education reported more than others that they felt they needed such support. Fortunately, they were also more likely to find it in these settings! Three respondents in higher education and

Support was important for adults, particularly upon enrolment:

The morning you had to come in and enrol - these things always seem to be very important. Like you had to be here at a certain time, and do a certain thing, and get it right. What if you got it wrong? I didn't realize it wasn't like that. [A member of the guidance team] said, 'I'll meet you outside and take you to the community lounge, and introduce you.' It was all easier than I had imagined.

[I] came in to register and I saw all these people - there was nobody my age group and I thought, 'I've made a right fool of myself coming in here.' Anyway, they said, 'No, not at all ... ' The [adult co-ordinator] put us at our ease immediately, and that was it.

four in further education would have appreciated such support – but failed to receive it.

We have already noted the greater formality in the approach reported by adults attending further and higher education colleges, compared to the more personal styles of school and community education, and it seems likely that these differences go a long way towards explaining client satisfaction with school and community education guidance. Clearly, prospective students appreciated being put in touch with a guidance worker whose role was quite specifically to provide the information, advice, and support students require. These adults were more likely to articulate their needs and have them attended to, than those whose only contact was in writing or at an Open Day, amongst a crowd of others.

We wondered if schools and community education providers did not make more of an effort with their adult students. Community education has, as its remit, the supporting and encouraging of mature students back to learning, so it is not surprising that guidance is a high priority. The size, too, of most community education providers facilitates informality and personal relationships, which are two guidance characteristics important to adult returners. The size of schools, too, may encourage more personalized guidance. We speculated that in schools an additional force was at work, too. Schools' main client group is younger children. Adults are visibly different from this group in a number of important ways. It seems, at first glance, that these two groups will be very difficult to integrate. Is it possible that schools have tried to compensate for these differences by providing extensive guidance and support networks – and that the purpose of this guidance is to ease adults back into what seems like an alien and threatening environment? Compare this with the lack of guidance perceived in higher and further education, where adults and providers' 'mainstream' client groups are less visibly different. Do such providers feel adults will require less help because they will fit in more 'naturally'? If so, they are making a grave error in judgement. We will return to this issue in Chapter 6.

Of course, not everyone wanted guidance at this stage. There were two common reasons for this: self-reliance and fear of knowing too much. In total, nine adults (almost one-fifth of the sample) viewed the acceptance of guidance as an abrogation of their own responsibility. These adults made it clear to us that they felt choices 'were up to them' and that no one else could make such decisions for them. We have already discussed how returning to education was a personal matter for most adults who felt that strangers would not be in any position to help them. Also tied up in this notion was adults' perception of themselves as *adults* – mature human beings capable of taking decisions about their own lives and not requiring counselling of any kind. Acceptance of guidance was seen as a admission of not being able to

cope. This was a difficult confession for adults to make, particularly if they were already feeling defensive about returning to education in the first place.

Self-reliance and fear of the unknown were common reasons for the non-use of formal guidance opportunities:

You've got to feel it out for yourself ... It's very personal, I think.

The only way to find out is to launch in ... If somebody had told me in depth about the course, I might be put off. I think it might put barriers up ... I wouldn't want too much information.

The second reason for non-use of guidance was fear. Adults worried that too much knowledge about the courses they wished to undertake would somehow 'put them off'. This was particularly true where adults were lacking confidence and feared that course content would be too demanding – or that their abilities would not be equal to the task. One woman told us:

> If someone had told me fourth semester was statistics, I would have thought it was much too hard. But if you come to it gradually, and take it in your stride, then I think you are better off.

Most adults did make use of some sort of guidance before enroling in their courses, even if it had been of the most rudimentary, information-seeking variety. How satisfied had they been with the guidance they received?

Perceptions of guidance

Had adults' experience of pre-enrolment guidance been positive or negative? Encouragingly, of the 43 adults who sought some sort of information or advice, the majority (34) reported they had been satisfied with the guidance they had received. Most important to adults was the helpfulness, friendliness and encouragement of the people with whom they spoke – either in person or over the 'phone. Adults appreciated contact with knowledgeable staff who could answer questions straight away, or direct enquiries quickly to the proper authority. Often, it was a matter of being lucky enough to 'hit it off' with the person on the other end of the 'phone – yet this luck could make all the difference. Adults liked being treated as individuals by someone who cared about them as people as well as potential students.

Adults deemed guidance experience to be positive when staff were **friendly, helpful and encouraging**:

[I 'phoned up] and the tone and friendliness of the voice over the 'phone was warming towards me ... I thought, 'Well, here perhaps is someone who will listen to me.' That is the pure and simple reason why [I chose this provider].

If they came on very formal, some [people] would not respond to it at all ... Obviously, you have to get to give them information, but it's got to be a friendly face ... a nice, friendly face.

Schools gave us the best examples of this positive, personalized guidance. We suggested before that their size allowed guidance staff to greet all prospective adults on a first-name basis and how guidance staff in schools were most likely to offer adults the advice and support they required. A number of adults stressed to us how influential individual staff members had been in recruiting them back to study and engendering their enthusiasm to return. Most adults echoed the woman who told us:

> She [the guidance co-ordinator] gave me the spurt I needed to get started. The day I went up [for the first time] she handed me the books and showed me the creche and told me not to worry ... She's very, very good – a mine of information.

In further and higher education in particular, however, adults were satisfied with very little, reactive guidance. Few expected that guidance services would take the initiative in any way. One man spoke of receiving the information he had asked for, 'no more and no less', whilst another spoke of 'crumbs off the table'. Again, the value of our in-depth interviews becomes clear. Although 34 respondents reported that they were satisfied with the guidance they had received, many of these never received any help other than a prospectus through the mail or a chat with the switchboard. Yet for most adults, this was enough, because they had neither expected more nor were aware that anything else might be available.

Perhaps the most distressing cases were those adults who, whilst professing satisfaction with the information they had received reported they had learned nothing about possible future options from their experience of return. They would probably go about choosing future providers in precisely the same sort of [aimless] way, because they still did not know where to go for guidance.

Nine adults did, however, report that they had had negative experiences of guidance at this stage of return. The most common reason given was the inaccessibility of the information offered. Although students usually succeeded in finding out basic information about course content (usually located in the prospectus), when they sought interpretation of this information, they were less likely to find the help they needed. Sometimes interpretation was quite literally required: a number of students who had not experienced formal education since leaving school did not know what Standard Grade or modular courses were, for example, or understand current terminology such as 'learning outcomes'.

One common reason for dissatisfaction with guidance was that **information was inaccessible and difficult to understand**:

I looked through the prospectus - I didn't understand what half the things were. It was only pointed out to me that Communications means English ... It was hard for me to come here.

You get a wee bit of paper saying you can do pottery, jewellery, and this, that and the next thing ... When you start, they give you the learning outcomes - what you're required to do and learn. I took [them home] and it was such complicated words. I was like, 'Wow. What's this asking me to do?'

In addition to these critical perspectives from students, we also have two examples of what, from an outsider's point of view, can only be described as rather surprising advice. This was given to two respondents who approached their local further education colleges with apparently unusual requests. One man had returned to education in order to qualify as an automotive mechanic. After discussion with the engineering departments at the local college, he found himself enroled in an introductory course in engineering and construction – with an emphasis on mechanical engineering! He had persevered with this, in spite of

It sometimes appeared to adults that providers were more interested in **recruiting students than guiding them onto appropriate courses**:

It's a mistake I'm here. I was under the impression that it was mechanical engineering, as in [automotive mechanics], but it turns out to be nothing like that ... It seemed to me they were desperate to get people to go on this course. When my course started off, there were 13 of us. Now there are only four. I don't know how they selected some of these people. I wouldn't have let them in the garden let alone the house.

the fact that it was, as he himself said, 'a mistake' and unrelated to his original plans. It was clear to him that he had received inappropriate guidance from a department eager to increase its student numbers.

Another woman, aged 55, had contacted her local further education college with the idea of doing a leisure class such as tapestry or sewing. Such courses were unavailable at the college and she was persuaded to take both a modular maths course and a Higher in APH instead. The student professed to be perfectly happy with the situation, even though she found the prospect of an exam extremely stressful and had no clear ideas about what she would do with her qualifications afterwards. She also thought that when she had finished these courses, she might still like to pursue tapestry at the college! We wondered if this woman might have been better served by leisure classes at her local school or community education centre.

Of course, we do not have sufficient information about these two cases to be able to determine objectively the appropriateness of the advice we have described. Perhaps the guidance these adults received was subtle and students' choices were influenced by being made more aware of the opportunities on offer. Both examples, however, raise the question of the impartiality of the guidance offered by providers, a cause for concern which will remain while colleges are under pressure to increase student numbers.

Summary

- 35 out of our 50 respondents effectively had no choice in deciding which provider was most suitable for their needs: either they knew of no other provider or their choice was determined by their personal circumstances.
- Respondents reported that they knew of the existence of providers either as a result of their own personal experience or through friends and relatives. Few respondents looked for formal guidance to help them decide on an appropriate provider or provision and those who did, did not find the experience to be satisfactory. Very few respondents made systematic inquiries on which to base an informed decision.
- Not all respondents contacted providers prior to enrolment. Those who did were seeking three types of guidance: information, advice and support. Schools and community education providers were markedly more successful than further and higher education institutions in providing the kind of detailed, informal and *personal* guidance which adults were looking for. This may be because schools and community education centres have a clear brief to attract and support adult students. Particularly in the case of schools, the marked differences between their two client groups – school pupils and adults – may have raised awareness of the needs of mature students, whereas superficial similarities between young adults and mature students in further and higher education may have obscured these.
- Some respondents made it clear that they had not sought guidance before enroling, either because they felt they should be self-reliant or because they were afraid of acquiring too much information.

- The majority of respondents who did seek guidance reported favourably on the friendliness and helpfulness of the guidance they received, even when they appeared to us to have received little help.
- The success of schools and community education providers in offering appropriate guidance to potential returners seems to be based – at least in part – on their recognition of the particular needs of adult students. As the number of mature students in further and higher education continues to rise, it may be that these institutions could benefit from studying the approach of guidance staff in schools and community education.

6 Staying on course

We have seen why the adults in our sample were participating in education and that this participation was the result of different combinations of goals and conditions. This conceptualization only addresses one side of the participation issue, however. It is equally important that adults stay in education – at least long enough to finish their current courses – and that they have a positive experience while doing so. We have argued that such positive experience breeds an inclination to participate in other, future educational opportunities. This disposition towards education can encourage the building of the community of lifelong learners that, in the government's view, is the key to an expanded and flexible workforce. Such a community is also thought to have important social benefits. There is evidence, for example (cited in Chapter 4), of education's 'multiplier effect', which strengthens the argument that successful participation contributes to a better educated population and is of general social value. It is vital, then, that returners to education have a positive experience. Adults must be encouraged not only to enrol in courses in the first place, but also to continue with their courses and to progress after their completion. A question we must ask, therefore, is *Why do adults stay in education?*

Current adult education policy emphasizes client-led provision. Learner choice is a key element in this principle. How can client satisfaction be ensured? We examined our data from two perspectives. The first was the factors which, at a personal level, seemed to help sustain participation. The second considered what providers could do to help encourage adult returners to complete their courses. We turn to a brief discussion of previous research in this area before examining our own data.

A number of research studies in the past have attempted to identify the factors leading to adults' satisfaction with courses, and so to their continued participation (Londoner, 1972; Boshier, 1973; Underwood, 1974; May, 1985). These quantitative studies employed statistical analyses to uncover those factors which contributed to adults' motivation to persevere with their courses. The extent to which teachers were encouraging and interesting; the quality of interaction with fellow students; and suitability of course content were all found to be important in helping to sustain participation.

In 1985, C. Norris enroled in several adult education classes in order to examine the process of becoming an adult student 'from the inside'. He found that the socialization of adults into study could affect their motivation: whilst expected benefits from a class might lead a student to enrol, the satisfaction gained from the class may be derived from different sources. In other words, although a student may choose a particular course for reasons of convenience and cost, it could well be that other factors, such as teaching methods and styles of assessment, determine whether or not s/he continues to participate. Similarly, although a provider may be chosen for its location and reputation, its facilities and guidance services may become more important to students as time progresses. Students' orientations, therefore, may change during their courses.

Past authors have attempted to categorize the forces that help to sustain participation into those concerned with the learner (personal factors) and those concerned with the provider (institutional factors) (Johnson, 1990; Marks and Elsdon, 1991; Merriam and Caffarella, 1991). Such personal and institutional components are a useful starting-point for an examination of our own data. Personal factors include motivation, personal circumstances and the availability of informal support from family and friends. Institutional factors include structural characteristics of the provider (availability of useful facilities, guidance services and efficient administration) and cultural characteristics of the provider (teaching and learning, assessment, and sympathetic treatment of adult students). By asking respondents about the informal and formal support they had received during their participation, and the advantages and disadvantages of the provider and provision they had chosen, we hoped to uncover the factors – and, importantly, the quality of the factors – that were most important in helping to sustain participation.

We have seen why the adults with whom we spoke had chosen certain providers and forms of provision at the time of their initial decision to participate. What did respondents tell us about their reasons for continuing with their courses? How far had their perceptions about the advantages and disadvantages of their initial choices changed? Were there additional forces at work upon their decision to continue their studies? It is to these questions that we now turn in an attempt to discover the underlying factors behind the sustaining of adults' participation.

Personal factors

Motivation

One of the most important factors in adults' continued participation came from within the participants themselves. This was their own personal motivation to pursue the course to its conclusion. Such motivation was vital not only for participation in the first place, but was also crucial in keeping adults going through difficult phases of their study. Adults felt this motivation was related to maturity. As adults, they felt they could control their lives and the choices they made. One of these choices was to participate in education. Individuals made 'adult' decisions about their lives and prioritized their commitments in order to sustain participation. Important in this motivation were adults' perceptions that they were participating 'for themselves'. The voluntary nature of participation was a key element in its continuance: as long as adults felt no pressure and were in control of their participation, they felt easier it to cope. No doubt, conflicts and difficulties are perceived as easier to handle if they are the result of one's own choices, rather than being brought on by forces outwith one's control.

Adults felt that this personal motivation was a major difference between their current participation and compulsory schooling when they were younger. They did not *have* to be there, rather they *wanted* to be there. Many pointed to the younger students participating in their courses and compared their senses of motivation and purpose: in all cases, adults felt that maturity and voluntarism contributed to a strong desire to achieve and make the most of their education.

Your attitude [as an adult] is different, because you want to do it. It's you that's chosen, at the end of the day, to be there. For whatever reason. So you want to finish it.

Some of the [younger students] - when you see them, you wonder why they bother. They don't seem really keen to be here. That's why I think it's an advantage at my age ... I've got no pressure from anybody to do anything. I'm doing it for me. So I've got better motivation to do it.

Informal support

Adults could not sustain participation on their own, however. Informal support, including help from partners, family and friends also proved important. We found many examples of individuals who were grateful for the support they had received from often unexpected sources, but we also found men and women who were feeling isolated and alienated from partners and family as a direct result of participation. For some of these individuals, resolve was strengthened, while for others, participation was becoming difficult to sustain. The traditional roles expected of men and women affected their continued participation as much as they had their original choices to return.

Women, particularly those with young children, had to take family commitments into account when making their initial participation choices. This group was also one that required most support during participation. Where providers' mechanisms failed or were non-existent and women lacked informal networks, the result could be demoralizing.

No matter how hard you try to be positive, in the end you feel depressed. I think men - single parents who are men - are more likely to get sympathetic help, like looking after the children. But women are generally expected to cope with everything, no matter what's thrown at them ... There's no help ... What if the children are ill? All I know is, I either [don't look] after the children, or miss class.

Certainly, where partners were able and willing to help with child care and housework (still seen, as we have described, as falling within women's domain) women returners were grateful, and many women whose husbands worked flexible shifts believed that this, to a large degree, enabled them to continue their courses. But even without logistical considerations, women experienced real guilt pangs resulting from what they saw as neglect of their children.

The majority of the adults with whom we spoke were either married or in a permanent relationship, and partners' attitudes were vital to many women's continued participation. One woman told us that it would be impossible for her to continue if she felt she didn't have the support of her husband. Sometimes, though, this support was conditional: women talked of having to 'prove' themselves through academic achievement before their partners would take their studies seriously. For some women, this was a real spur to success. Family were more likely to be supportive if they could see the visible results of participation, perhaps in terms of employment gained or improved relationships.

My husband has noticed since I've done this, I'm happier - because I'm not just living in the same four walls, day in day out. I'm out doing things. He knows it's done me good, because we're getting on a lot better. He's quite proud of me, I think.

The family were quite proud of the fact that I was doing it, it a silly sort of way. Like, 'Yeah, I'll get the kids today because you're going to school!' Whereas, if I'd been going to get my hair done, that would have been different. So they put themselves out to accommodate me. And I feel quite good about that.

[My family] are quite proud of me, but would have been annoyed if I was just going to play at it.

Sometimes, however, partners reacted in the opposite way. They could come to feel suspicious of the changes education was making to some one who was once familiar to them. Though initially supportive, husbands in particular resented their wives' involvement in something that was fundamentally apart from their lives at home. As we saw earlier, self-realization was an important motivation for many women, particularly those who had been at home caring for children for a period of

My husband was supportive to start with. I don't know that he likes it going any further ... I think he feels threatened by the fact that I'm doing these things. They're not part of his life at all. I don't want them to be. This is something I do for me.

time. So although these women were achieving their goals, it was at a cost that their partners were sometimes unwilling to shoulder.

Men, too, found the support of their partners and families important, although for them the pressures as main wage earners were somewhat different. Whilst many women (particularly those participating in further and higher education) could rely upon their husbands to fund courses and support them during their studies, many men did not have this financial support and could only participate if their wives continued to work. This could cause tension in marriages where men were expected to earn the wage and support the family.

Women or men who had been able to enlist the support of their partners still had to contend with the expectations of the rest of their families, who might not be as sympathetic. This was particularly true of women who were not following a pattern that was considered 'normal'. One woman was keeping her further education course a secret from all except her husband, whilst another was being harangued by her husband's family for being selfish and not taking care of him sufficiently.

Sometimes, of course, such opposition was, in itself, an incentive to success. The motivation discussed earlier was likely to be strengthened by an 'I'll show them' or 'I'll not let them push me around' attitude. Of course, in our sample of participants, negative pressure had not been sufficient to dissuade anyone from pursuing his or her course. This was partly due to personal motivation, but was also due to the support adults found from other sources – particularly the community of learners at their providers. Indeed, many attributes of providers – not just the support that could be found in them – were vital in helping to sustain participation. It is to providers that we now turn.

Providers

The literature tells us that certain structural factors, such as effective guidance services; sensitive induction arrangements; high quality premises; flexible child care facilities; flexible library and computing services; good publicity; and skilled evaluation of provision are particularly useful for adult students. Other aspects of providers' culture, including positive interaction between adults and their teachers; sensitive teaching and learning; and positive, diagnostic assessment also help to sustain adults' participation. What aspects of their providers did the adult returners in our sample most appreciate? Perhaps surprisingly, two of the most common barriers reported in the literature – lack of child care facilities and financial difficulties – did not feature greatly in our interviews. Of course, as we sampled *participants* in education only, we cannot comment on the numbers of potential returners who never enrol due to fundamental hurdles they are unable to overcome.

Staff

The single most common attribute of their providers which adults appreciated was an encouraging and helpful staff, particularly course tutors and lecturers. This echoes previous research which found that:

> ... students place a great deal of importance on their relationship with their teacher, and their perceptions of the teacher's qualities ... emerged as the predominant factor in overall satisfaction and attendance behaviour. (May, 1985 pp11-12)

It became clear in our interviews that for most adults, the teachers they saw every time they attended classes were the most important point of contact with the provider – and providers were generally judged by the quality of their staff. In this respect, teachers' overall attitude towards adult students was deemed more important than their skills in the classroom. Interestingly, adults did not generally associate guidance staff with positive or negative aspects of their provider, but focused instead upon the helpfulness and support provided by their course tutors. We will discuss specialized support and guidance services separately. But what qualities, not necessarily related to teaching and learning, did adults appreciate in their teachers?

It was felt to be important that staff were available and accessible – that is, that they not be intimidating to adults who were seeking help. Staff needed to be encouraging and welcoming if adults were to feel accepted and valued by their provider.

Conversely, staff who were inaccessible or unsympathetic could ruin an adult's experience of participation. Fortunately, such teachers were few and far between in respondents' experience. Either the vast majority of teachers of adults are committed to their needs, or participants who have difficulty with their teachers fail to pursue their courses – and so were not picked up in our sample of participants!

Adults appreciated helpfulness and accessibility of staff:

I think the staff here realize the problems that particularly women have got, and they persevere and are with you. (community education student)

They are all very, very helpful ... Anybody that I've approached from any of the departments have been more that willing to bend over backwards to help. (FE student)

... although not all staff were deemed to be so:

Some of the lecturers look down at [mature students] ... The general impression I get is that they would prefer it if there weren't mature students. (HE student)

I'm afraid the teachers couldn't care less if we were there or not. There's no feedback. None. [It's] so negative ... it's spoiling [it]. (FE student)

Staff who were sympathetic to adults' special needs were particularly appreciated, especially in terms of recognizing adults' outside responsibilities. Any small allowances that teachers could make for adults' other commitments were viewed gratefully and seen as an important gesture of support and understanding. This was seen as an important indicator of providers' sensitivity to adults – although many participants with whom we spoke did not necessarily expect to be treated differently. Adults in higher education, in particular, tended to see themselves as 'needing to fit in' with the established ethos of their providers, and they often accepted that they would not experience their education as 'fully' as younger students might – particularly if the adults were part-time. Interestingly, it was in higher education, too, where allowances for adult students were most appreciated. Is this because other providers – such as further education colleges and schools – have been more successful in integrating adults into the mainstream of their concerns?

Sensitivity to the special needs of mature students was a real bonus at some providers...

For mature students, they are very accommodating. They know we have commitments from home and work. (HE student)

The majority of the teaching staff have been very helpful ... in the past, they have shuffled exam dates and things to help suit us, which has been very decent of them. (HE student)

... although adults often needed to accept that providers' concerns were often concentrated elsewhere:

I think I would play down the problems for mature students, because I realize it's geared for young people. But I suppose you shouldn't think like that. It should be geared for everyone. (HE student)

Communities of learners

Another aspect of providers which was somewhat less easy to quantify, but no less important to many adults, was their atmosphere. Did adults feel welcome and valued, or did they feel alienated by their provider? Special lounges for mature students were felt to help greatly in fostering a positive atmosphere, as adults often sought one another – initially, at least – for support and companionship. This 'community of older learners', into which adults felt they could tap to share experiences and problems was fostered most in community schools, where no doubt the mainstream culture of younger students was viewed by providers as too remote from adults' experience to expect them to share. However, adults in higher and further education were as likely to feel the need of a positive atmosphere for adult students – but providers were less likely to foster it in these settings. Perhaps these providers believe adults are indistinguishable from their mainstream clientele. Adults themselves did not feel this way, however, and were likely to feel alienated in such settings unless they encountered other adult students in their classes. A visible community of adult students, then, was important to mature participants whatever the provider – and providers could encourage such a community through the use of special lounges or other areas for adults.

A **positive atmosphere** was equally important to those who felt welcome at their provider ...

The people here are very kind ... You could be lonely - you come into the lounge and you don't know anybody: they make you welcome. (school student)

There's lots of mature students [here]. I find where there is more mature students, you're at your ease - we all seem to get on fine together. (FE student)

... and to those who felt alienated and marginalized:

I've found it a bit distant. I think it's difficult to get to know people here. (FE student)

Occasionally, I feel as if we're not as important as [the college's] other concerns ... They seem to be meddling in quite a few pies. (FE student)

Attitudes differed towards **school classes with younger students:**

Because I'm older than they are ... I feel as if they would turn around and say, 'She's past the age of going to school.' I feel they'd make fun of me ... I couldn't go into a class with a bunch of 15-year olds.

It was worse the first day, as well, because as the only adult [in the class] I was introduced. I knew they were all aware of my being there anyway, but that made them more aware! I didn't like that.

I think it takes a lot of guts for an adult to go back into education - it's not so bad if you are going into a class that's full of adults. It's a wee bit terrifying if you're going into a class that's fifth and sixth year kids ... It was quite scary at first, but I made a conscious effort ... They were very good: 'Oh, don't sit there, come over and sit beside us!' The kids here - it's a fact of life that there are adults [around the school].

I prefer to be with the kids. The adults-only class - we are at a lot of different stages ... and we're all doing individual things. Whereas, when I'm in with the pupils, we're all at the same level, the same stage, so we can discuss things. It's useful to talk, because we are all going through the same thing.

We were particularly interested in adults' response to situations where there might not be such a community of older learners. These situations were most common in school classes, where an adult returner might be the only individual aged over 17 in a group of 20 or more. How did adults cope with classes with younger pupils? This proved an emotive subject with all adults who were enroled in school classes with younger pupils at Standard Grade or Higher level.

Every adult with whom we spoke in schools expressed trepidation about going into classes with younger pupils, and worried they would be singled out as 'different'. In some cases, adults worried they would be the object of younger pupils' scorn. Where adults had not attended classes with younger pupils, choosing instead adults-only classes, this feeling remained. Where adults had participated in classes with younger pupils, however,

the feeling always changed with experience. While admitting initial anxieties, all of these adults enjoyed their classes and found benefits from mixing with younger pupils. Some even said they preferred these lessons to those that were intended for adults only! An important factor here appeared to be the ethos fostered by the school itself: where adults were a 'fixture', commonly seen around the school and attending a wide variety of classes, pupils accepted them as learning peers. Teachers who treated adult students as members of the class – rather than singling them out for attention – could help greatly in this. Community schools gave us the clearest, most positive examples of successful integration of two learning cultures: whilst allowing adults their own space for socializing or 'getting away', at the same time they encouraged mixing and sharing during lessons. This combination appeared to work most successfully, and no adult who had experienced it had anything but praise for it.

Facilities

Useful facilities were also important, and meant the difference between participation and non-participation for many adults. We have seen how for women with pre-school children, for example, child care provision was an enabler to return. Child care continued to be an issue for female participants. It was important, however, that creches be affordable for students – free provision of child care in schools and community education was especially appreciated. In higher education, where child care was more expensive and could not be guaranteed to students, women often had more difficulty in pursuing full-time courses. The nature of provision for under-fives could also be inhibiting for women: if creches were open only during office hours (which, again, was most often the case in further and higher education), the range of courses available to women was limited to those which fell within these times. Child care on demand was one of the most important facilities providers could offer: failure to offer such a service meant, quite simply, that women with small children were unable to attend. Every one of the nine women in our sample with pre-school children (participating full- or part-time) relied upon the use of their providers' creche facilities.

Libraries and other information facilities, too, needed to be open at times which suited adults' often erratic study hours, and resources had to be sufficient to allow adults access when required. Unlike younger, full-time students, adults often had very few occasions in any given week when access to such facilities was possible – and failure to secure books or

Useful **facilities** included creche provision, libraries, computing services, quiet study areas and pleasant refectories, and were most often found in community schools and providers of community education. Adults in further and higher education were less likely to be satisfied with the facilities available to them:

If it wasn't for the creche, there's a lot of us that wouldn't come to the school. It's good for the kids as well - they're mixing with other kids. (school student)

We're given this room to study in. I come up here to study, do my homework ... Put the kids in the creche for a couple of hours and then I get everything out of the way. (school student)

There is a good library as well. I haven't come across anything that I couldn't get when I wanted it ... We do some work on computers as part of the course, and they are always there if you need them. (community education student)

The place is overcrowded ... the eating facilities are very crowded, coffee bars are crowded. There's nowhere you can go for a bit of piece and quiet. (HE student)

It's the pits. It's dreadful ... There's too many folk to cope with. Even if they had another refectory, it would help. When you're here often, it gets to be awfully important. (FE student)

One of the disadvantages of this place is the lack of word processors. People are very often fighting to get on them ... particularly when it gets near deadlines. Some things are only installed on four machines ... you can imagine when 27 people are keen to get on them. (HE student)

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computer time when necessary led to intense frustration. Often, adults simply could not accomplish the required work without innovative juggling and imaginative use of photocopies and loan arrangements. Part-time adults, in particular, felt they were at a disadvantage when it came to accessing facilities that were, in theory, available equally to all.

Finally, adults valued providers where there were quiet areas. While younger students may not mind – and indeed, may thrive on – boisterous refectories and a generally festive atmosphere, adults disliked noisy and crowded common areas. Although sometimes they were intimidated by large groups of younger students, most often they would have simply preferred a bit of peace and quiet in which to collect their thoughts and perhaps do some studying. Special quiet study areas were particularly useful for adults who needed to do all their homework at their provider. Many adults lacked quiet places at home in which to study, and found that family demands militated against concentration!

Timetabling

Another measure of sensitivity to adults was timetabling. We have seen how adults felt they had special needs, and appreciated staff who took these into account. An important way in which providers could help their mature students was through sympathetic and flexible timetabling of courses. One woman with whom we spoke had all her Office Skills modules scheduled within school times to enable women with children to participate – but this was the only such course about which we heard. Schools had often attempted to make Standard Grade and Higher courses more suitable for adults by scheduling double periods and back-to-back courses, rather than necessitating visits to the school three or four different days a week, and adults found this to be very successful. Higher education providers, however, were noted for failing to take the needs of mature or part-time students into account when timetabling lectures and tutorials and as we have seen, this could be particularly problematic where creche provision was being relied upon. Although this was another area in which adults often made allowances to cope, it often meant they were unable to take the courses they wanted to, and enjoyed their participation less as a result.

Sensitive **timetabling** could be a great help to adults with other commitments ...

It's a full-time course ... but the hours are different. The hours are geared to your having a child at school. So you start at half past nine and finish at half past two ... I'i's been quite successful. (FE student)

... but in higher education, timetables were often inflexible and class times inconvenient.

There are no special facilities or favours for part-time students ... It's difficult to get suitable tutorial times. The creche used to close at five, so if you have something from four to six, it's a problem. It's different for younger students who don't have families or other [commitments]. (HE student)

It's very difficult to timetable things in our household. But I find the college timetable is not helping me. The fact that there are hour gaps between lectures ... those odd hours are wasted. (HE student)

Administration

One structural factor mentioned by adults was high quality administration. Adults appreciated providers who organized courses efficiently – again, given adults' other commitments and limited time at their provider, they wished to waste as little time as possible on unnecessary administrative problems. Poorly organized enrolment systems could be particularly demoralizing, as this was often adults' first

impression of their new provider – and perhaps their first experience of return. Not knowing where to go or who to see added greatly to feelings of insecurity and reticence. Insecurity was also a problem as courses progressed, and adults wanted clear guidelines from administrative sources as to what was expected from them. The feeling that goal posts were changing and expectations unclear led to frustration, and the perception that courses lacked 'quality' – an important consideration for adults who were paying fees! The student in the second example, for instance, reported that whole sections of his distance learning course had been unavailable at the allotted points in the timetable, and that this was causing great confusion for staff and students alike. The woman in the third example was worried by the number of modules that were being forced into a very short period of time – and felt she would probably have to retake the year in order to catch up. These are students' views, of course, and the providers concerned might have described these situations differently. We felt it was important, however, that students reported these negative perceptions.

High quality administration was appreciated where it existed...

Their organization is superb ... Judging by their attitude and the professionalism and care they put into the [things] they do, I couldn't get much better anywhere else (HE student)

... but its absence could lead to demoralized frustration!

Part of the course we're meant to be doing hasn't been made available ... so we're having to reorganize our workload. Everything's being re-arranged at the last minute. Stuff like that is very difficult to deal with academically. (HE student)

The teachers don't even know what they're supposed to be teaching because they don't have their full year's programme. 'Here's a 16 week course and I've got to give it to you in 8.' The system is all to pot! (FE student)

Provision

Forms of provision, as well as the providers themselves, were also an issue for many adults. We wondered if certain forms of provision had proved, in light of experience, more suitable for certain sets of circumstances or certain goals. We were interested to see, therefore, that all three forms of provision – full-time, part-time, and distance learning – presented similar advantages and disadvantages to different individuals. Adults were as likely to choose any of the three forms of provision to fit in with other commitments, for example – but all forms of provision were equally likely to interfere with other commitments!

We have seen, in our discussion of *conditions*, that adults in similar situations often made very different choices, and developed different strategies for dealing with their varied responsibilities. The same is true for the ways in which adults viewed the success with which their provision choices slotted in with their domestic and employment obligations. As these three examples show, women found different advantages in all types of provision: whilst distance learning might mean more time at home, part-time courses also allowed time

It was important that education provision fit in as far as possible with other commitments - but this did not lead adults in any one direction:

It doesn't take over your life the way the full-time course does. You actually have it going in conjunction with other things in your life ... Family commitments are such [that] I would have spread myself too thinly, and I wouldn't have done any of my jobs competently [on a full-time course]. I don't want my kids to be latch-key kids. (DL student)

I've got an eight-month old baby and I feel she is far too young to leave in the creche for too long ... If I was here full-time, I wouldn't have time for anything else like make dinners, and the house would be a mess. I have to be there when [my husband] comes home ... And I've got a job again [one night a week]. (PT student)

Your time is there, you're not squeezing it in with so many other things ... As a mother and a housewife, I have the house and kids and there's only a wee bit of me. If I say, 'That wee bit of me is a full-time student,' then I'm allowed to be a full-time student! (FT student)

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for domestic commitments, whilst full-time provision could allow women to compartmentalize their responsibilities more easily in the eyes of their families.

Having said this, all the adults with whom we spoke were busy people with extensive commitments outside their courses. They all had certain things in common, regardless of the variety of provision they had chosen: tiredness, conflicts, and the feeling that other priorities were somehow 'slipping'. This was true for both men and women – although it seemed that women tended to worry about it more! Of course, in our sample of participants, conflict had not reached the stage where study was becoming impossible to sustain: they had all developed strategies for coping with their many responsibilities. Some of our participants were doing so under incredible pressures: one woman with two young children, for example, was pursuing a part-time university degree course whilst working 25 hours a week. The key to continuing in her circumstances was her motivation and determination: she said she would have pursued the course to its conclusion no matter what obstacles were placed in her way. This seemed to be the case with many of the adults with whom we spoke. They were determined to succeed no matter what was thrown at them. If this motivation is lacking, we suspect no form of provision is flexible enough to guarantee there will be no conflict with other commitments.

Participation of all kinds, however, interfered with adults' other commitments:

I feel now I've got to work harder to maintain everything ... This weekend, the wife [asked] 'What will we do this weekend?' [I said], 'Sorry, I've got some more outcomes [to do].' 'Oh well, I'll do something with the children.' Oh guilt! (FT student)

You need to prioritize ... We're doing 15 to 20 hours most weeks, and it's bloody hard work. It eats into your family life. (DL student)

My youngest son said just before Christmas - I had my exams and my nose was in the books - ... 'You know, you used to be quite a good mummy.' And that will be instilled in my brain forever. (PT student)

Expense, too, was a problem no matter what form of provision had been chosen. Apart from the issue of fees for courses where finance was not obtained from external funders, most adults found the expense of participation ate into their family's finances. The problem of the 'benefit trap' is also well known. Student grants can affect the level of payment of income support, social security and family credit payments, actually resulting in individuals suffering a drop in income when they enrol in a course. It has been reported elsewhere (Munn, MacDonald and Lowden, 1992) that grants and burseries can also be assessed at too low a level, and that payments from the Department of Social Security can be delayed or problematic in other ways. All of these difficulties are added worries for adult returners.

A disadvantage of all forms of provision was **expense:**

[Participating full-time] I'm now living off a grant. My wife is still working but the grant has certainly changed our lifestyle ... It is such a drop that it's financially very difficult.

It's quite an expensive way of doing it. [The Region] pays your summer school, but the company I work for doesn't sponsor people who do [distance learning].

You've got to pay your fees ... The [part-time] course is £290. That's a lot from income support.

All of the participants with whom we spoke were affected by the financial implications of the course of study they were undertaking. We have seen how, for men in particular, financial considerations were first and foremost in determining many participation choices. The knock-on effects of sustained participation were felt by both the men and women in our sample. As these examples demonstrate, participation of all kinds required a certain amount of sacrifice on behalf of

returners and their families. Again, we suspect the economic pressures on many adults are sufficient to make them drop their courses if motivation is insufficient or the long-term investment seems unrealistic. We were surprised at how ill-informed most participants were about their position financially: most did not know where they could go for advice, and many had taken out bank loans or were working part-time, though we suspected they qualified for grants or state benefits of some description.

Adults' motivation was felt to be a very personal thing. They appreciated provision that did not in any way compromise this, or put unwanted pressure on them. Part-time courses and distance learning courses, in particular, were seen to allow adults to work at their own pace with little or no pressure or competition. This was one of the great advantages of such provision. It was particularly true of first-time returners, who were uncertain as to what demands would be made of them and how they would adjust to study. Many full-time students told us they had started out part-time 'to get into the swing of it', only moving to full-time provision when they had gained sufficient confidence.

It was important to adults that they feel not too pressured by their study:

I think two and a half days is plenty for anybody who's just come back. To get into the swing until you learn it all, so you know what's required! (PT student)

You get to take it in your own time. You're not getting pushed - in a class I'd be getting pushed, and maybe not understand it the same. (DL student)

I had been out of education for years, and I felt if I put too much pressure on myself, going right in and doing it full-time ... I don't think I would have completed it ... I had one essay to do at a time, instead of three. (PT student)

This is not to say that first-time returners only participated in part-time or distance learning courses. Many adults pointed out that full-time courses were an ideal way of concentrating the mind – and that this was one of their great benefits. Where academic motivation might need a bit of encouragement, full-time courses provided sufficient pressure to work hard and ignore outside distractions!

Students saw motivational and academic advantages in full-time provision:

You get into a frame of mind that you are geared up to working ... As soon as you're away from this atmosphere of work, you switch off.

Full-time, my brains are working all the time. It's pushing me harder [but it's easier to study] ... When I'm home, sitting with my books, the slightest distraction is a good excuse ... Studying on a part-time course would mean even more time at home, even more disturbances.

Part-time would have been no use to me. I wouldn't have sufficient motivation to do this part-time.

We have seen that for most adult students, the desire to be a member of a community of learners was important, and provision was seen to affect this, too. Adults reported that they often felt 'more like a student' if they participated full-time, and that this was an important part of the educational experience. Peer contact of other varieties was also vital to students' success, whether for sharing ideas or materials. One man told us, 'The more we can help each other, the better it is for everybody!' Again, all forms of provision were seen to promote peer contact – even distance learning, but then only if study groups had been established.

Adults felt immersion in the student culture was an important aspect of participation - and that this was facilitated by full-time provision:

I think maybe I would have got more out of it doing it full-time. I actually felt I was more of a student - I was more involved - when I started doing more units.

Either they don't see me - or maybe I don't see myself - as an actual student. So you miss out on what's happening in college. If there was a course coming up that I might be damn good at, it flies past you because you are only a part-time student. I miss [out] because a lot of people in my class don't know me ... I think as a part-timer, you are maybe always an outsider.

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Distance learning can mean **insufficient tutor contact:**

The only thing you do miss is the one-to-one with your tutors. If I'm stuck on something - you can't always get a tutor on the phone. If you're stuck, you're stuck. I once wasted a whole day on a biology problem. I just hadn't a clue. And that was it. You do miss being able to go to a tutor and ask them.

There's about six hours of tutorials over the course, which is not very good. You've got a tutor on the end of the 'phone, but it's not the same.

... and **insufficient peer contact:**

I miss the opportunity to be around other people, to throw ideas around, and I feel isolated because of that. We occasionally meet up, it's just that it's less clear where you get that support from.

Summer school and college weeks were an important component of distance learning courses:

I was apprehensive about going to the first one. In fact, I tried to get out of it, including trying to get myself pregnant! ... But when I got there, it was just brilliant ... I didn't want to come home. I enjoyed it so much - and it really brings the course together for you. If you don't go to summer school, you really lose out.

I find that may be the most useful part of the course, because that's where I can interrelate face to face with the other students and tutors.

Distance learning had two disadvantages not shared by other forms of provision – lack of tutor contact and lack of peer contact (where study groups had not been established). Distance learning students could feel isolated at times, and unsure of their direction or progress if tutors were not readily available. Similarly, lack of contact with other students (which we have already seen was important for most adults) meant adults missed the support and society they might have received had they attended classes on a part- or full-time basis. Summer school and college weeks were therefore seen as vital in ensuring person-to-person contact of both kinds, and almost all the distance learning students with whom we spoke (particularly in higher education) believed this was the most important part of the course.

The table below summarizes the data on advantages and disadvantages of provision. It encapsulates the idea that most forms of provision were perceived as having similar advantages and disadvantages, by showing what respondents said about each.

Table 6.1: Advantages and disadvantages of different forms of provision

Advantages	*FT*	*PT*	*DL*	Disadvantages	*FT*	*PT*	*DL*
Not too much pressure	x	x	x	Expense	x	x	x
Affordable	x	x	x	Conflicts with commitments	x	x	x
Fits in with commitments	x	x	x	Too much pressure	x	x	x
Peer contact	x	x	x	Use of facilities difficult	x	x	x
Use of facilities easy	x	x		Alienation from culture		x	x
Shorter courses	x			No tutor contact			x
Sufficient pressure to achieve	x			No peer contact			x
Immersion in student culture	x			Course too long			x
Summer school			x				

FT denotes full-time, PT denotes part-time and DL denotes distance learning
x denotes items reported by two or more respondents

Adults' Classroom Experiences

An important part of the return to education is the return to learning. Adults told us that one of the most difficult aspects of participation had been adjusting to academic demands after years of absence from the classroom. Often, adults felt they

had somehow 'slowed down' or 'lost sharpness' – particularly if they had spent time away from education and employment. Sometimes, a new way of learning was required altogether – particularly if the returner was embarking on a modular or distance learning course. The self-discipline and motivation required in these circumstances was often quite a new and unexpected demand. The concept that they were once again 'in education' was a novel one. Adults, with great responsibilities and varied life experiences, found it difficult to adjust to the more dependent role of student. What factors had enabled them to succeed in making this adjustment? Three elements emerged from the data: relationships with teachers; organization of the curriculum; and assessment practice.

Adult education was seen to differ from adults' experiences at school. This was a revelation to individuals who had dreaded returning, and then been amazed by the ease with which they were able to fit in to the new learning environment. The single biggest factor in this change was the relationship adults had with their teachers – whilst some adults believed this was a function of their own changing attitudes, others believed their teachers treated them differently as adults.

If the attitudes of teachers were important to adults, then so were their skills as educators. Much has been written about how adults are best taught, and it is not our intention to contribute to the andragogy debate here (see Knowles,1980; Mezirow, 1981; Davenport and Davenport, 1985; Gorham, 1985; Yonge, 1985; Jarvis, 1987; Merriam, 1987; Pratt, 1988). Adults in our sample appreciated teachers who were clear about their expectations, and positive about their students' achievement. Interaction among adults and their teachers was deemed important – but so was interaction between the students themselves, and it was acknowledged that teachers could foster this or discourage it altogether. Adults in school classes and community education tended to be happiest about the ways in which they were being taught, whilst those in further and higher education were more critical of

Adults often found **making the adjustment** to learning difficult:

I think it was partly me getting my head round this new learning. [I've] been used to full-time education where somebody's standing up there throwing the stuff [at you] ... [Now] there's far more responsibility for me to throw the stuff at myself which requires a self-discipline I hadn't experienced before. (HE student)

I think adults find it hard to start with, to admit they haven't understood something. (school student)

I knew I would be slow, but I didn't realize I would be this slow! [The younger students] are coming out of school, so that they're geared up to thinking up answers for questions, whereas if you've been at home, mouldering for ages, you lose your sharpness. (HE student)

One of the most common benefits of adult provision was the way in which it **differed from adults school experiences** ...

As soon as I came back, I realized this wasn't what I thought it was going to be. You're not sitting in a classroom like you did when you were 12. You're treated different as an adult student. (school student)

I think it's the attitude of the lecturers. They treat you more grown-up. You're more in it together with the lecturers - they're helping you. The teachers at school - there [wasn't] the same communication. (FE student)

... although not all adults found this to be the case:

One of the tutors talks to you as if you are one of the children ... He talks to you as if you should know and you feel [humiliated]. (school student)

Teaching mattered to adults:

She's always positive - she always praises you and gives you good motivation. I never understood all this before. But looking at it now, I think ... your teacher can make or break your course ... It's all down to communicating between the students and the teacher. If that falls down ... (FE student)

The only thing that has niggled me has been the quality of the tutorials and tutors ... [They] come along badly prepared and they tend to drift away without any progress being made ... A waste of time. (HE student)

I haven't come across a large number of very well-organized tutorials. I would like to organize them better, to get people to start talking. I don't think the lecturers are trained to get people to contribute. (HE student)

the instruction they received. Is this because generally teachers in the former two contexts are trained educators? Certainly, few teachers of adults are trained as teachers of adults in particular – yet some were clearly more successful than others in encouraging their students and stimulating avenues of communication. As we have seen, teachers' qualities – both as educators and providers of support – were one of the most important factors in determining the quality of their students' overall experience. Teachers should be aware of their students' need to view teachers in these two roles.

Adults felt they had different learning needs from younger students, and course structure could help to take these into account. Modular provision and suitable forms of assessment, in particular, were felt by adults to help them in adjusting to learning again.

All of the adults in further education with whom we spoke, as well as three in schools and five in community education (22 adults in total) were participating in individual modules or modular courses. Interestingly, the adults taking modules were the only ones to comment upon the effects of the curriculum *per se* – perhaps this is because they felt it was different from the learning they had previously experienced. Most adults reported that they had adjusted quickly to the demands of a modular curriculum. Negotiation was felt to be an important bonus of this sort of learning. Again, this seemed to relate to adults' negative experience of a required curriculum when at school. They appreciated the fact that they could go at their own pace in lessons and were not being taught as a whole class: as we have seen, inordinate pressure on adults was a disincentive to sustained participation. Although individualization is not a stated aim of modules, nonetheless many adults reported that they felt they were being taught in this way. The fact that modules were 'practical' helped adults to see their relevance in a way that had not always been possible with academic subjects at school. Although many adults preferred minimum teacher supervision, some were rather nostalgic for more traditional methods of learning. A very few adults would have appreciated more lecturing from their teachers and less independent learning. It should not be assumed that all adults favour a negotiated, individualized approach – although this was true for most of the adults with whom we spoke.

Most adults thought **modules** were a good way of learning:

[Modules are] a good way of learning ... You've got to apply yourself, but you're not examined ... I enjoy it. It's really learning - it's an easier way to break people into learning. (FE student)

You can go at your own pace [with modules]. You don't feel pressurized ... It gives you more time to study the section you're on. (FE student)

I like the type of learning I'm doing at the moment. It's not a set programme. There's no, 'Do this, do that.' It's a discussion. (school student)

... although some preferred more **traditional** methods:

When I was at school, they would put it on the board and you would learn it and you would do it, which I found was a bit easier. Now you have to work your way through units, and if you get stuck you ask for help. But it can be a bit awkward, because I could be asking for help all the way along the line! (FE student)

One thing most adults were agreed upon was that continuous assessment was preferable to examinations! Most respondents could not conceive of sitting down to take an examination 'at their age'. There were, however, disadvantages with this sort of assessment. In higher education, where continuous assessment was combined with examinations, there was too much pressure during term on adults who often had onerous responsibilities outside their course. Another, quite different criticism was leveled by one man in further education. He felt that criterion-referenced

assessment was too easy – and 'cheapened the certificate'. 'If you fail,' he told us, 'You've got to be really thick!'

High-quality course materials were very important, and not just for distance learning students. We have seen that access to libraries was often difficult for adults on part-time courses, and hand-outs and notes presented in lectures and tutorials could help to make up for this. Some providers took it for granted that adults would provide their own materials and books – but this proved difficult for some adults with other, heavy financial commitments. This was not to say hand-outs could be used as a substitute for other teaching methods or were appreciated without support. But well-structured, relevant resources were a valued addition to lectures, tutorials and other classroom activities.

Assessment was an issue for many participants:

I think because of my age and sex, exams are a trial. I've talked to other ladies my age, and they do have problems at certain times with concentration. Really, exams are worse than essays. I don't enjoy them at all. (HE student)

I would hate to have to go through a whole year's learning with an exam at the end! (FE student)

Exams I find are a bit hard because it's a long time since I've sat exams ... I find it's a lot to take in. I would prefer a course with modules, that you work on a subject when it's fresh in your mind. (FE student)

I've found this year pretty gruelling. A lot of it's because of the way it's [assessed]. You're doing so much course work you don't have adequate study time ... There's a lot of academic pressure, meeting deadlines. (HE student)

Well-structured, free course materials were important:

The materials are very good and in many respects I think we get more material to work with than the people who are doing the full-time course ... We're getting more written information, which is good. (HE student)

The course is efficiently structured ... The course materials are really well-written ... I think it's far and away the most efficient learning I've seen. (HE student)

Materials and things - you are just left to get stuff like that yourself ... There are zero copies available to the class... If you are like me, claiming unemployment benefit - it's good that the unemployment office pays for your course, but there are materials as well. I'm not stone broke yet, but if [I] were, it would definitely be a problem. (FE student)

Guidance

One aspect of providers in which we were particularly interested was on-going, formal guidance. We hypothesized that adults, having as they do particular needs – and perhaps returning to education for the first time – would find real benefits in their providers' guidance services. We therefore asked the adults we interviewed specific questions about their experiences of continuing guidance.

We have already seen that most adults looked to their course tutors or lecturers for support. But how many adults also made use of the formal guidance networks at their provider? Although most adults were aware of the guidance services their providers had to offer, half of them (24 respondents) had never made use of them! Of those who had made use of such services, the vast majority had found the experience to be a positive one. So why didn't such a large proportion of returners take up the opportunities for guidance that were offered? Three reasons that emerged in interview were a belief in self-reliance; the perceived inappropriateness of the guidance on offer; and fear.

Non-users of guidance often expressed the notion that it was their responsibility, as adults, to support themselves. If they did not do so, then they perceived that they had somehow failed. Perhaps this is related to the importance of 'choice' we discussed earlier. Although this self-reliance was most often discussed in terms of personal issues – such as finance or family difficulties – we were interested to see that some adults felt this way about academic problems as well. Seeking help was an admission of failure – and so adults preferred to persevere themselves. Related to this

was the association of guidance with counselling – an unwanted intrusion into private matters. One individual with whom we spoke talked of the 'stigma' of guidance, and explained that he would be worried by what other adults might think if they knew he had sought guidance at his provider. Even adults who were willing to seek help from their teachers were sometimes unwilling to seek support from other, specialized guidance workers.

Another negative perception of guidance was that it was inappropriate. Guidance could be seen to be inappropriate (by non-users) in two ways. At providers where there was an existing 'mainstream' culture into which adults were being fitted – such as further and higher education – adults believed that guidance provision was geared to younger learners. Older learners, with employment experience and varied educational backgrounds, felt that guidance staff would not understand their situation and could not appreciate their complex needs. Guidance was perceived to be somehow geared to younger learners, all of whom might have roughly similar experiences. This reflects the second way in which guidance was perceived as inappropriate – for individuals. Precisely because adults saw themselves as individuals with particular goals and concerns, they felt the 'assembly line' of providers' services would not be able to cope with these.

The third factor militating against the take-up of guidance was fear. Adults feared to approach strangers with problems but, more importantly, they feared to admit failure – which is how 'going for guidance' was perceived. Does this fear reflect unsuccessful schooling and negative experiences of unsympathetic teachers? We have seen that the stakes in returning to education are high – and that adult returners set stringent standards for themselves. What must the consequences be for such individuals to admit that they can't cope or are having problems? Do they fear that they might be told they are unsuitable students and would be better off if they dropped their courses? Certainly, some of the adults in our sample preferred to ignore problems – particularly academic difficulties – rather than have them identified by their teachers.

Adults failed to take up guidance opportunities for reasons of **self reliance**:

You can only get so much help without acting like a bit of a wimp and being a bit stupid. You have got to have the balls to go for it yourself. (FE student)

You get guidance, you get help. But at the end of the day, it's me who puts pen to paper. It's taught me to be alone. It's my battle. (FE student)

... **perceived inappropriateness**:

It's not geared up to mature students. It's geared up to people getting their first degree ... The industry that I'm in, and the route that I hope to go along, is not the sort of thing they would understand. (HE student)

[Guidance] is not for me. Maybe for somebody else. For me, it's different. (HE student)

...and **fear**:

It got to the point where two weeks on the trot I didn't go to my class, with the embarassment of [not having done] this piece of work. [I was] frightened to say to the teacher, 'I can't do it.' I feel the help wasn't there for me ... I thought there's nobody to help me. (community education student)

Of course, not all students who failed to take up guidance opportunities did so out of choice. Two of the individuals in our sample had no knowledge of any guidance services available at their provider, and were relying on their friends and family for support. Both were worried about their academic situation however, and were frustrated at the thought that they had nowhere to go. Two adults in a sample of 50 is not a significant number – but should *any* adult be ignorant of the support available?

The idea that guidance services are 'geared to other people' combined with guidance's negative image resulted in a low take-up of support services. As our sample includes participants only, it was constituted of people who, for the most part, could succeed without such support. What about people who cannot? We have already seen that other institutional factors were more important than guidance services for many adults. Is this simply because guidance services are outside many participants' experience? How can guidance make its presence known to all participants? Adults who had made use of guidance services had two suggestions: they believed guidance should be more proactive and that it should be more accessible.

Most adults had been reticent about seeking guidance at first. Where guidance had been offered as a matter of course – at initial interviews, or in the early stages of a course – it was much appreciated. But afterwards, adults were often lacking the confidence to seek it out for themselves, preferring to wait until it was offered again. They clearly did not see guidance as any sort of 'right' or service 'owed them' by their provider. They felt guidance should be more proactive, and would have appreciated regularly scheduled interviews or formalized information networks. Some adults felt it quite difficult to 'stop by for a chat' and would have preferred appointments to see guidance staff, so that they could prepare what they they wanted to say and the questions to which they needed answers. Individuals lacking in confidence often found the guidance arrangements at their providers intimidating.

Guidance services could help adults by being more pro-active:

My teacher has always made it clear: certain courses are coming up. She points you in the right direction. She leaves it up to you, though, to follow it up - and you are maybe not feeling quite confident about it. Maybe you are needing a bit of a helping hand. (FE student)

[I've had one] guidance interview ... to see if I had any problems. I think a couple more of those would be better, more than just one. Maybe one each term ... Maybe that's my fault for not approaching him and asking him. (HE student)

This was not the case in schools and community education providers, however, where the atmosphere we have already discussed was relaxed enough to put adults at their ease. Many adults in these settings told us that they had no guidance – just 'chats' or 'brief words' with staff in common areas and coffee lounges. Yet it was clear from our interviews with these adults that such conversations were extremely important in helping to sort out problems and take decisions. Most often in cases such as these, there were one or two individuals whose sole function was to act as support for adult students – and their presence was considered invaluable by those with whom they came in contact! Because they were always visible, it was not difficult for adults to see them, and because they were on a first name basis with most returners, they were not considered threatening.

Accessibility of guidance was another area where adults felt there was a good deal of room for improvement. Guidance services were perceived by many of those who used them – particularly for financial purposes – as faceless and bureaucratic. Visibility was often a problem, with adults unsure of where to go or who to see about a particular problem. Adults complained that too often, providers' guidance services could not help with external matters – such as loan arrangements or benefits – and that where information was required from outwith the provider, it became impossible to find. Good publicity of guidance, and skilled staff who can guide adults in the right direction if they are themselves unable to help are necessary for effectiveness – yet in higher and further education, adults felt guidance services were characterized by neither of these.

Summary

We found that participation was more easily sustained if:

Personal circumstances

- adults have the personal motivation to succeed
- adults have access to informal support

Institutional circumstances

- staff are helpful and accessible
- the provider promotes a positive atmosphere
- the provider is perceived as sensitive to adults' special needs
- facilities are free and easily available
- timetabling takes account of adults' other commitments
- administration is of high quality
- provision fits in as far as possible with adults' other commitments
- adults' financial situation is clarified
- adults do not feel too pressured by their study
- adults have full access to 'student culture'
- adults have sufficient peer and tutor contact
- the learning experience is deemed to be 'different than school'
- teaching is of high quality
- the curriculum takes adults' needs into account
- assessment practice takes adults' needs into account
- course materials are free and well-structured
- guidance is appropriate, accessible and pro-active

7 What do adults gain?

Although, as we have seen, a good deal has been written in the past about what adults hope to gain from participation – that is, their goals – very little research has set about discovering whether or not adults believe they actually realize these aims. This is partially due to the expense of longitudinal studies – tracking cohorts of students throughout their studies and to their first destinations after leaving requires an investment few funding bodies are willing to make. Such data is also difficult to collect, as it relies upon people's articulation of their own perceptions of their own achievements. Of course, we do have access to such statistics as are gathered by Labour Market Surveys and other annual studies tracking graduates. These studies record qualifications gained; first destinations; and employment gained or not gained. The data, however, do not seek to examine or explain the underlying forces behind such achievements, nor do they reveal participants' own views of the benefits they have accrued from education.

The literature records that people's goals can change during participation (Cross, 1985) and we suggested in Chapter 3 that this was true of our own sample . What are the effects of these changing goals? How far are adults conscious of them? Are new goals always superior to the initial ones? These questions raise the philosophical issue of the purpose of education. Does education fulfil its purpose best if it helps adults to achieve their initial goals, or is its mission to encourage people to raise their sights and embrace new aims for themselves? It is not our purpose to enter into a debate on this subject here, but these questions should be kept in mind when considering the position of those in our sample who found their original participation goals changing as their courses progressed.

Without reviewing whether or not adult returners achieve their aims, the effectiveness of courses cannot be evaluated, nor can progression be fully understood. McGivney (1990) has argued that:

> Adult educators recruiting new groups have to maintain a fine balance between giving people realistic expectations of what can be achieved through participation and not raising their hopes too high. (p179)

How far are adults' aims consistent with the provision they choose? Do adults choose appropriate means for realizing their goals? To answer these questions, we must understand what adults see as the benefits of participation. This chapter explores the gains respondents told us about in interview and the ways in which these had changed from their initial purposes in returning to education. We consider the effects of these gains on adults' future plans. By gathering this 'soft' data – personal views about achievement and possible progression – we hoped to uncover the underlying influences of participation upon the adults with whom we spoke. We turn first to a brief description of the literature on educational outcomes.

Woodley (1987), in his study of barriers to participation, asked respondents about what they felt had been gained from their courses. He reported that:

> The major benefits gained by those on qualifying courses are primarily related to learning. Benefits 'in relation to yourself' are somewhat fewer and those 'in relation to others' are the least mentioned. (p 173)

Negative effects were found to be few, but 10% of his sample did report that their studies had 'moved their families further apart' – though 25% reported that their studying had encouraged others in their family to study. He found that the pattern for students on non-qualifying courses was similar, with benefits relating most frequently to learning and gains in self-confidence.

A Training Agency survey (reported in the Labour Market Quarterly Report, November 1990) found that the two most common gains reported by Employment Training leavers were the building up of confidence and learning to get on with other people. Another, recent small-scale project attempted to identify the benefits which trainees felt they had received from the Employment Training programme in the West of Scotland (Johnston, 1991). This study found the most common gains (in order of frequency of response) to be: contact with others; improved self-confidence; job information; increased knowledge; enhanced self-esteem; qualifications; and finding out about oneself.

We have seen in our discussion of returners' life circumstances that quantitative surveys, whilst valuable for the identification of such circumstances, offered little in the way of useful explanation about how these operated in relation to initial participation. Similarly, the gains identified by the statistical studies described above are a useful starting point from which to begin thinking about such benefits, but fail to describe the importance of these gains for participants and the effects they have on adults' circumstances and future participation. Through in-depth interview, we sought to discover how far respondents were satisfied with the gains they felt they had made; which gains they hoped still to realize; and the effects these gains were having on their plans for employment and progression.

In interview, the 50 adults talked about what they felt they had gained from returning to education. In some cases, individuals talked to us after only a few weeks of attending classes, while others were in the final term of a four or five year course. Even after a relatively brief period of participation, however, respondents were able to identify personal achievements and other benefits they had acquired from the courses they were attending. How far were individuals' gains in harmony with their reasons for participation in the first place? How far were these gains unexpected? Did gains change people's reasons for participation, thus changing their plans? Did certain gains lead to progression?

The gains about which adults told us in interview fell into two broad categories: personal gains (including the development of skills and knowledge) and external gains (including effects on employment situation or family). We now turn to a discussion of each of these two categories of outcomes.

Gains

In interview, we asked adults about the gains they felt they had already made. We left this question very open, and did not ask respondents to pick items from a list, or rank items in terms of importance. In this way, we sought not to limit adults' responses, and gather as wide-ranging and representative a list as possible. It is interesting, therefore, that most of the people we interviewed described the gains they had made in very similar ways. Key gains were reported to be increases in confidence, motivation, and knowledge; improved skills; social gains; new interests; and enhanced self-image. These are each discussed more fully, below.

We have seen that, initially, most individuals were participating for the purpose of achieving external goals – that is, qualifications and employment. As the adults we interviewed were all still participating in their courses, these gains, by and large, were still to be realized. During the course of participation, however, adults had come to see that there were many other benefits – apart from qualifications and jobs – that education had to offer. In some cases, as we shall see, these gains resulted in initial goals becoming less important than they had been to begin with. In other cases, initial goals had been superseded by other plans that arose from gains made on the course. Most interestingly, immediate employment was no longer the main aim for the majority of respondents: at the time of interview, the majority (28 respondents) had changed their minds, and decided that they would either progress to the next stage of education or continue with similar courses before seeking work. This change in goals was a direct result of the gains people felt they had made from returning.

Before turning to a discussion of the relationship between gains and progression, however, we describe the gains that adults told us about in interview.

The most common gain people were able to talk about was the **increased confidence** brought about by participation. People talked about confidence in different ways, as these three examples demonstrate: confidence meant different things to different people. For some – especially those who reported that they had been quiet in school or were 'like mice' when dealing with people in their daily lives, participation in education had helped them to overcome their shyness. The confidence to speak in front of other people was an important benefit: two women had each become activists in their tenants' associations, and believed this was a direct result of the confidence they had gained through participation. Others, particularly women who had been at home for some time, spoke of increased assertiveness and being unafraid to voice opinions in front of other people. One woman told us, 'Now I feel ... what I think – maybe it does matter!' As the second example shows, control over one's life was an important by-product of this confidence.

A different, but no less important sort of confidence was the sort that came with positive experiences of participation. Individuals who had done badly at school or were nervous about sitting their first examination in years found that with each small academic success their confidence grew. One woman at university reported that 'Last year I suddenly realized I wasn't going to fail. I was always worried I was a bit out of my depth. Now I've relaxed a bit.' What had engendered this new confidence? The hurdle of passing her first-year exams. Although she knew that future exams would be hard work and probably more difficult, the symbolic act of coming through the first year 'alive' had left her optimistic to think the previously unthinkable: that she might actually obtain her degree.

Most adults had to overcome various barriers and hurdles to return to education. Some of these were associated with education itself, whilst others had to do with personal circumstances. We were encouraged to see that participation itself, and the confidence that was engendered from it, were sufficient motivators to give people hope for the future and the belief that they could overcome prospective hurdles that would be placed in their way. This was an important factor in progression. The 65 year old woman who believed that she could now 'face Goliath' typified those individuals who felt education had changed their lives in this way.

The most common gain reported by respondents was an increase in confidence:

When you're into your course, you get [more confidence] ... I actually feel now, I would tackle anything. Honestly. If it was what I wanted to do, I would go for it.

I've gained confidence and a belief in myself that I'm capable of doing [any]thing ... I feel I'm more in control of my life, now.

It surprises you ... I think now I could face Goliath!

Gains often led to changing goals, and these changing goals often contributed to unanticipated progression. Some adults, however, believed that a **motivation to do more** was in itself a gain from participation – even if progression had not been an initial goal. It is now well-known that positive educational experience breeds positive educational experience, and the first-time returners with whom we spoke were already speaking in these terms. Certainly, confidence was a factor in this. First-time returners seemed unwilling to risk, at first, the hope that they might achieve success, and therefore be able to progress. Perhaps they genuinely surprised themselves with their own unexpected abilities. One women told us, 'You don't know what you've got until you start digging for it!'

Respondents talked about how their participation motivated them to do more:

I didn't think I would go on, after this. I think I can do it, now.

It surpises you, and makes you want to do a wee bit more.

The further I go, the further I realize I can go!

Another common gain reported by respondents was an **increase in academic knowledge**. Although this had been an implicit accompaniment to initial stated goals such as the obtaining of qualifications and skills, it was interesting to see how many adults had come to value knowledge for its own sake. Some, such as the man in this example, even told us the qualifications were becoming less important, as knowledge was something they had gained and could never be taken away. Enhanced knowledge also increased enjoyment of courses, as content mastery aided the learning process and made things easier. One man told us, 'Initially it was difficult, but now it's an insult to your intelligence!'

This acquisition of knowledge also contributed to progression, as a little knowledge led to a desire to know more. Progression, in some cases, was planned purely for this reason. This was particularly common in higher education, where second degrees or further degrees were being planned by a number of people. One of them told us, 'I would like to go and do [another degree] for the simple reason that I like to learn things!'

Increased knowledge was the second most common gain reported by respondents:

It's like quantum leaps each week as you approach things like maths ... Six months ago I would have looked at that page and said, 'No, I'll just not bother' ... Even if I attain nothing else ... I have taken a massive leap forward from day one ... I've gained an increase in knowledge.

Adults also reported that they had learned **new skills**, or improved existing skills. As these examples show, the skills adults valued and appreciated acquiring varied widely. The first woman in this example valued the life skill of being able to fill in

forms without relying upon her husband: the man in the second example felt that memorising the alphabet was a terrific achievement. The third quotation came from a woman who was currently identifying the subtexts in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*: she could see how this academic skill was going to enhance one of her greatest pleasures – reading. Another man was learning new computer programming languages, which he felt would help him in his search for a job. All of these individuals shared an immense satisfaction in the gaining of skills they had not previously possessed. The acquiring of new skills was the principle goal for many respondents, initially – and they hoped to acquire them for employment reasons. Many more people saw this acquisition as an important bonus of return, and in a much more general context than they had previously done.

Improved skills were an important outcome of participation:

I can fill in forms now, without panicking. I used to say to my husband, 'I can't do that,' whereas now I can do it.

I think there's been a great improvement in my writing and that. I can do the alphabet right through, now!

Having been a reader, I never sat and thought about what I'm reading. And it's given me a whole new outlook ... It's good to be able to sit and analyze something. I never would have known how to do it - but of course, it's all explained to you in your assignments.

Respondents also made important **social gains**, most often by meeting new people and making new friends. We have already reported that this was an initial goal for some respondents and that, in any case, interaction with and support from other adult learners was an important factor in sustaining participation. This more 'personal' side was important, too – and not just for people participating for social reasons. Adults enjoyed the new friends they made, and the conversations they had informally with other students contributed greatly to their satisfaction with their courses.

Social gains, such as meeting people and making friends, were common amongst respondents:

I met some nice people, refreshing people, the kind of people who talk about politics ... They don't do crazy things for a living. It's a small thing, but I have really enjoyed it.

It gave me the opportunity to get to know people in the area ... It's given support to me and my children.

I've gained a lot from the other people on the course and their experiences.

As the man in the first example demonstrates, meeting new people 'of a different sort' from those in one's own community could be a rewarding experience. For him, making new friends was the start of a distancing of himself from his previous associates. We have already described how, for some people, this was a purpose in returning to education in the first place. It could also be an important motivation to progress, as one's ties with one community slowly were replaced by those of another. But what price this 'progression'? Could a similar situation not also lead to alienation and unhappiness? Interestingly, none of our respondents believed this to be the case, though such reactions have been recorded in the literature (Daloz, 1988).

New interests often resulted from participation, too. Some adults were surprised by the degree to which they enjoyed academic study – as the second respondent in this example clearly demonstrates. Subjects which participants had found boring in school now seemed interesting and stimulating. Respondents had a number of possible explanations for this. One was that older people have wider interests generally, and that this is a result of maturity: it is unreasonable to expect a 15-year old actually to enjoy politics or chemistry! Perhaps the voluntarism we described as helping to sustain participation also had a role to play in encouraging adults to enjoy subjects they had previously hated.

Most adults, though, attributed their increased enjoyment to the teaching methods they were experiencing in adult education and the more active approaches they were being encouraged to adopt. One woman, active in a local history group, told us:

> It's hard to imagine, to see me now – I had an E in history. (It was my worst subject!) I think it was the way it was taught. And because I'm older, wiser, and I'm actually doing the research myself [I really enjoy it]. It can be boring if you're getting constantly lectured, no matter what it is.

Participation led to **new interests**:

Before, I used to read Jackie Collins books - I still do, occasionally - but now I read my history books, sometimes, instead of a novel. I would rather pick up a history book and read that because I find it more interesting, now.

Discovering now that I enjoy things I couldn't stand 15 years ago was quite a shock!

Of course, these new interests were an important issue when adults were considering whether or not to progress to the next stage of education, and one of the most common contributors to unanticipated progression was the new interests adults had identified on their current courses.

Self-awareness was another important benefit of participation. Education encouraged adults to reflect upon their lives: their values; their goals, their abilities; and their places in their communities. As the first example shows, this process was not always a comfortable one, but all those who described it to us believed it was valuable. This deeper understanding of self contributed greatly to adults' changing goals. Whilst they might initially have participated on impulse, or with no firm goals in mind, self-reflection often caused buried hopes to surface. One young man, who had never worked and was participating purely for avoidance reasons, confided, 'If I could, it would be a big thing for me to transform this into a job ... At the back of my mind, I think I really will.'

Participation encouraged respondents to **reflect upon themselves**:

I can't say I always enjoyed it, but it's been good for me ... Getting back into what I do and why I do it. Re-examining my own personal values.

It's made me look at myself and opened up my eyes on so many things!

What I've gained more than anything else is a deeper understanding of myself and my own abilities.

Many respondents, particularly women, felt their **sense of self** had been enhanced through participation. Housewives often returned to stimulate their minds after years at home. For them, participation was a way of re-asserting their identity. 'Ownership of identity', 'well-being', and 'self-worth' were crucial gains for individuals who felt they were being ground down by family responsibilities and thus had no identity of their own. We have also seen, however, that some partners looked on this achievement less favourably – but this only increased the resolve of the women with whom we spoke (see our discussion of *informal support* in Chapter 6).

Many people reported that participation had enhaced their **sense of self**:

I think it's given the me back to me. I am a person, not just a mother or a wife. I'm me. I've got my own personality again.

I've gained something within me that says whether it works or not, I am trying to do something for me ... [I've gained] a well-being within myself.

Self-esteem. Worth that wasn't there before. I've got my own individuality, rather than being David's wife or Karen's mum or somebody's daughter ... This person re-emerged.

Three respondents reported that they had already **gained jobs** as a result of their participation – one woman after less than six months of attending classes! Two of these individuals had begun their courses with employment goals – but obtaining employment was not causing any of them to withdraw from their courses. In fact, all three were planning to progress to the next stage of education upon completion of their current courses – though this had not been a goal at the beginning! Although we expected that finding a job might cause some individuals, especially those with employment motivation, to leave their courses, we found the opposite to be true. The few adults who had found work were thinking that if participation could lead to a job, what effects might progression have? They were raising their sights as each goal was realized. We shall return to this in the discussion of *progression* (page 83).

Other positive gains were mentioned by only one or two people. Good preparation for progression was an important outcome for individuals who had enroled in their courses with the view to moving on to (in these cases) nursing college or university afterwards. 'Dipping their toes' into educational waters had shown them, in a relatively stress-free environment, what would be required. 'It's getting me used to study,' one woman told us, 'If I can do all of this, this year, then I can do my full-time training!' Two individuals on modular courses reported that they had already passed some assessments, and had therefore already received some of the qualifications they were seeking! One young man had received acceptance onto a new course, whilst two other individuals could already see the benefits participation was having on their work. One woman, participating to take her mind off poor health, actually felt participation had improved her health! Finally, one women believed her participation in a degree course had already had a positive effect on her children:

> My daughter, she's 20. She left school with no qualifications. She would be happy to do what I'm doing – she thinks it's wonderful ... She knows she'll do it like I'm doing it ... My son can't wait to get [to university]. ... So it's very positive for them.

Only one person in our sample of 50 respondents was unable to identify a single gain he had made during his course of study. All of the remaining 49 adults were able to tell us about the many achievements to which they felt education had contributed. Of course, respondents differed in the degree to which they were able to articulate their gains: five adults told us they could only identify one, but all the rest reported multiple gains. Some talked about as many as five or six! There was no difference, interestingly, between the ways in which men and women described their gains to us. Both groups were equally likely to talk about personal gains and mention more than one. Below is a summary of the most common gains people told us about in interview. It is important to keep in mind that we did not ask people to choose from a list: these were the gains people told us about spontaneously and without encouragement.

Table 7.1: Summary of gains

Gain	*number of respondents (n=50)*
increased confidence	28
enhanced knowledge	16
improved skills	14
new friends	11
motivation to do more	9
new interests	9
sense of self	
increased self-awareness	8
employment	5
	3

Were there any outcomes that respondents felt had had negative effects? Two individuals implied that, where previously they had been satisfied with their situation, participation had made them dissatisfied. The woman in this example, for instance, felt that her uncertified course had given her aspirations, but not the means to realize them. She still lacked what she felt were the basic qualifications necessary for a job in her chosen field (museum work). In fact many adults who had entered a course with a view to immediate employment were altering their plans as time went on and, when we spoke to them, were considering progression to get further qualifications. We shall return to this theme in our discussion of *progression*. (page 83)

Adults could find that participation made them **dissatisfied**:

Obviously, it would help the finances if I got a job. But now that I've done all this history, I feel I should be doing something that I'm interested in. Not because I have to, but because I want to. Because it's interesting. I don't want to just get a job in a shop - now I've learned this, I feel I've got more to offer.

Gains and changing goals

From this data, we can formulate a conceptualization of adults' changing goals and the implications these have for progression. Goals may change, and often do, during participation. These changing goals are the result of increased confidence and knowledge; the acquisition of new skills and interests; and the motivation generated by successful educational experience to do more. If these new goals can no longer be met through the current course, then adults seek to find a course that will help meet them. This often results in a desire to progress to the next stage of education. As long as the current course is perceived as helping to realize current goals, then adults persevere with the course. When new goals arise, and can no longer be met through the current course, then individuals seek a new course – or options outside education (such as employment).

The left-hand table below displays the future plans of the 50 adults we interviewed. Alongside it is the list of respondents' primary, initial goals. Comparison of these lists demonstrates how far adults' goals had changed during the course of their participation. Getting a better job, which had previously been at the top of the list of participants' goals, is now fourth. The opposite is true of progression. Whereas upon initial return, progression had been the goal of only six adults, that number has now more than tripled. Six additional adults hoped they would be able to progress without leaving their current jobs.

Table 7.2: Summary of future plans

Plan	*number of respondents (n = 50)*
progression	21
continue course (not working)*	7
progression whilst retaining current job	6
continue with course while working*	5
employment/better job	4
uncertainty	4
continue with course while working*	3

*same or similar course

Table 7.3: Summary of adults' initial goals

Initial goal	*number of respondents (n = 50)*
employment/better job	21
avoidance	9
progression	6
for interest	5
qualifications	4
new skills	3
for self-satisfaction	2

This switch in emphasis from employment to progression is most striking. Why was progression as an option now being chosen by respondents instead of immediate employment – which had been their initial goal? Was this because they enjoyed education so much that progression was more attractive than withdrawal after the course? Were people finding that their courses and the qualifications that resulted from them were insufficient for the realizing of their initial goals? Or were individuals' goals changing during the course in a way that made progression the only possible way of realizing them? It is to these questions that we now turn.

Progression

We have seen that adults' confidence grew with participation, and that this led some adults to believe and wish that they 'could do more'. This confidence sometimes bred higher aspirations. George, for instance, had never admitted to himself he might like to be more than a long-distance lorry-driver. Yet success in his ENCON course was encouraging him to think he might be able to qualify to teach in secondary school. To this end, he was planning on pursuing an HND the following year, and enroling in a SWAP course after that. Yet he never wanted to look too far ahead, preferring to think about this progression one step at a time. He told us he didn't know if he had the ability to go to university, but that if he succeeded in the HND and SWAP course he would. This way of thinking about progression – never wanting to set one's sights too high for fear ambitions will not be attained – was a common one.

When we spoke to George, he was pursuing a modular course at college designed as an introduction to construction and engineering. He told us that he had been 'lazy' at school and 'been struggling' in the early days of the current course. But then:

It's difficult to see anything that can top what I've done up to now ... I thoroughly enjoy it - the satisfaction you get from completing something - you should hear me going whoopee!

Despite initially signing on for a one-year course, he planned to go on to do an HND in engineering, and was entertaining the dream of going to university to train as a teacher.

We have also seen that adults often developed new interests during their courses, which sometimes led them to think about possible careers they might not have considered before their return to education. May had never considered social work as a possible career before going back to school – but it was now quite important to her that she give the college course a try. She no longer felt working as an airline hostess would be fulfilling, given the new interests she had cultivated. This was going to require that she move from school to college, but she had received a good deal of guidance from the adult co-ordinator at her school about what to expect and the use she would be able to make of her qualification. She was not worried by this anticipated change of culture.

May had come back to school with the sole purpose of gaining sufficient Standard Grades to be considered by airline companies as a flight hostess. This had been her life's ambition since she had been very young. After almost a year of studying such varied subjects as history, English and French, however, she was beginning to change her mind:

Coming back to school, I'm not sure it's what I want to do now ... If you'd asked me six months ago, I'd have said definitely the airlines. But I've been putting a lot of thought into it. Job satisfaction.

When we spoke to her, she had applied for a three-year college course in social work and was 'really hoping to get in.'

In other cases, adults' plan to progress had no real bearing on their employment goals: this was particularly true of adults who were following distance learning routes for employment reasons. Bernadette, who was now 'into the way' of learning was planning to pursue a degree – but for personal reasons. We have seen, too, how many of the participants had found their way onto their current courses 'by accident'. It seems to be quite common that adults will progress from course to course for no other reason than that they enjoy learning. Distance learning routes were a particularly effective way of achieving this progression, as they tended not to be too expensive and did not interfere unduly with adults' other commitments – particularly if they were working. We have seen, though, that individuals also progressed to full-time courses for this reason.

Bernadette was undertaking a distance learning diploma in social work - for employment reasons. Initially, she had no plans to progress any further, but when we spoke to her, whe was planning to follow up the course with an Open University degree in a related subject:

At the beginning, I wanted that bit of paper. It's still important, but I see the value of it. What I've gained from it ... I feel I'm going to be into the way of it, and into the way of learning. I want to carry that on ... I think it's because things have fitted in quite well - I feel quite optimistic at the moment ....

All of these reasons for progression can be seen as positive outcomes of the education process. Adults in these three circumstances take the decision to progress out of enjoyment of learning, growing confidence, and the developing of new interests. However, a number of people had somewhat more reactive reasons for progression, related almost entirely to the state of the labour market in time of chronic recession and unemployment.

Many adults were unwilling to re-enter the job market (after a full-time course, particularly), and seeking progression was a way of putting off the inevitable (and perhaps unrewarding) search for a job. Nell, certainly, was worried about her chances of getting a job, and feared rejection by employers. Perhaps she was also nervous of getting a job – after an

Nell had returned to do a degree in librarianship in the hopes of getting a job in a library at the end of the course. She was now not so sure that this would be as easy as she had originally thought, and was considering other qualifications that might enhance her chances in the labour market:

I think I would like to go and do business management, just to tie in with the librarianship ... I would like to get a job at the end of it ... It means more money at the end of the day ...

absence of 12 years from the labour market. We have suggested elsewhere that training can be seen by participants as a substitute for working. We have also questioned government initiatives that encourage people to train when there are no jobs. In Nell's case, she would be seeking further qualifications without first seeing whether they were really necessary for the job she wanted to do. She might, in fact, inflate her qualifications to the point where she was going to make it even more difficult to find a job. She was receiving no guidance in this area, and did not 'feel well-informed'.

Others were eager to gain as many qualifications at as high a level as possible before applying for jobs, hoping these would compensate for a lack of experience and age. Peter was confident that his BSc would be viewed favourably by employers who might otherwise be suspicious of his decision to change careers and his lack of experience. This was *his* perception, however, reinforced only by the technical college at which he had been accepted for his degree studies! He had received no independent guidance on this matter, and indeed, many adults were unsure of how their ages would be perceived by potential employers. They would have appreciated guidance on this matter. One woman was very uncertain about the position in which her new degree would leave her:

Peter was seeking to change careers and become an engineer. When we spoke with him, he was pursuing an OND in engineering. During the course, however, he had decided to enrol for a BSc in engineering, as a way of enhancing his job prospects:

I'm 25 just now. I would find it quite hard to get a job, I think, [without any experience]. But if you've got a degree, I think there's a good chance you can work up - having no qualifications - Even if you start off at a lower level I think you can build up when you get into a company ... Whereas, 25, if you've just got an OND and no work experience, I think it would be very difficult to get a job.

> Whether they'd like mature people or not, I don't know. I wonder, you see, in interviews. If someone's sitting there – they're 22, with their honours, and I'm sitting there – 40-41, with my honours – will they have me? I mean, I'm not going to leave and have children, but I don't know.

Careers guidance – and guidance about the usefulness of various qualifications – is a topic to which we shall return in a moment.

There was also a small but frustrated group of people like Jean, who were uncertain about their plans and unable to see beyond their current course. Often, these were adults who had initially returned with no clear employment or progression goals in mind. Sometimes, however, the confusion was caused by goals that had changed as a result of the course itself. Although participation had led to enhanced, or more far-reaching, goals, adults might be uncertain as to how to deal with these, or what the next possible stages might be. We have reported that one man, who had initially returned as a means of escaping boredom at home, now hoped he might be able to find a job. But how could he go about this?

Jean was pursuing various modules through a distance learning route at her local college. Although she was hoping to become an estate agent, she had little idea about the qualifications she needed or the ways in which she might find out about them. She thought she might go on to do other courses, but wasn't sure:

I don't know how I'm going to go about [becoming an estate agent] ... I'm just going to keep doing courses ... I would like to do full-time in computer studies, something like that. Something where I'm practically guaranteed a job at the end. I don't know. It's quite hard to say.

> I don't know where to start looking for a job ... I am all over the place. It is just like a different language when you start looking at a career. I am just going to keep [doing the modules] until I can't do it any more.

Guidance, then, was as an important issue for people who were nearing the end of their courses as it was for people at earlier stages in their participation. Three particular sorts of problems emerged: those to do with adults' uncertainty about their goals; those which arose for individuals who were uncertain about the value of their qualifications; and those for individuals who needed to weigh the benefits and disadvantages of progression and immediate employment. It is to this issue of guidance for progression that we now turn.

Guidance for progression

When we asked respondents where they would seek help in making decisions about their future, the single largest group did not know. There was frustration over the isolation many adults felt when making decisions about the use they were going to make of their new skills and qualifications.

It was surprising to us how few respondents were aware of their providers' careers departments – only five reported that they had visited it or were intending to visit it, and most of these were in higher education. While self-reliance was often the stated reasons for this, many adults were suspicious of the careers service, or felt it was inappropriate to their needs, in the way that we discussed earlier in the chapter on sustaining progression.

Table 7.4: Sources of guidance for future plans

Guidance source	*number of respondents (n = 50)*
doesn't know of any guidance	18
course lecturers/tutors	11
future provider	6
providers' careers department	5
family/friends	4
self-reliance	3
providers' office staff	2
employer	1

Of course, for many of our sample it was early days. Those in the first months of a two or three year course had not yet investigated their options for progression or employment upon completion. As all of our sample had future plans, however, it seems that such guidance is necessary even at the earliest stages of study. One young man, planning on progressing to higher education after the completion of his current OND course was still uncertain as to the usefulness of his qualifications in the labour market and wished he had received such advice *before* starting the course:

> [I would have liked help] with what kinds of jobs you could apply for when you've finished your course. That would have been helpful. They don't tell you what areas or what jobs you can go for.

One further area of guidance need inferred from the interviews was related to progression destinations. We suggested in Chapter 5 that, initially, adults chose their providers for a variety of reasons, and that these reasons were often unrelated to the courses offered by them. Was the same true of providers of progression opportunities? Or did adults' new goals and access to guidance affect the ways in which they chose future providers?

Progression destinations and patterns of progression

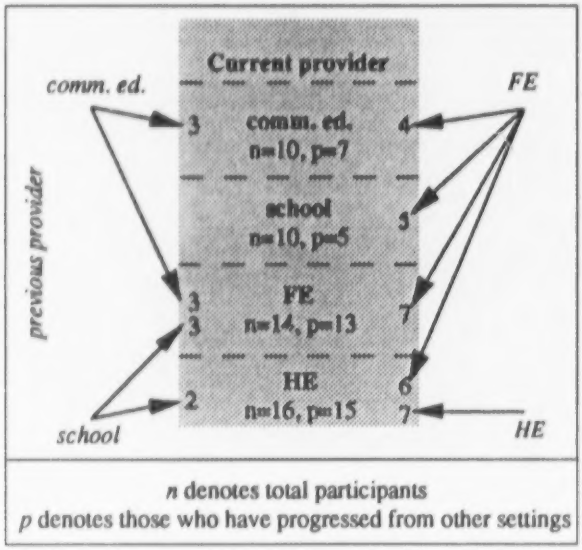
In seeking better to understand patterns of progression and adult students' movement between settings, we examined the settings of respondents' current participation relative to those of their previous and hoped-for participation. In this way, we hoped to discover if there were established routes of progression.

The data concerning current providers and previous providers was inconclusive. This, we feel, was largely due to the fact that, in many cases, a number of years had elapsed between returns to education. The data related to current participation and future progression, however, revealed a number of patterns and progression routes. Each of these sets of data is discussed more fully, below.

Previous participation and current return

Figure 7.1 displays the settings in which our respondents were currently participating (the middle, more darkly shaded column) as well as the settings in which they had last been involved in education (shown in the four corners of the large box). It is easy to see from this representation chosen progression destinations. For example, 13 of the 14 current participants in further education had last participated in the following settings: three in community education; three in schools; and seven in further education. At first, some of these numbers may seem surprising. Why, for instance, did four participants in further education later return to community education – and why did five other participants in further education return to school? As we suggested in our much earlier chapter on individual circumstances, previous educational experience did not always breed sufficient confidence for progression 'onwards and upwards' to take place. Indeed, if previous participation had taken place many years before, the qualifications gained might now be perceived as past their sell-by date. One woman, participating in Higher mathematics modules in school had previously taken an Open University course in child care and a 'vocational' course at her local college after leaving school. She felt, however, that both these experiences were remote – and that as a mature student she would not have the confidence to go back to college right away. What might at first appear as a backwards step, therefore, was in fact a necessary stage in her return. Many adults who made similar decisions – participating in community education or schools despite previous further education experience – had comparable stories to tell.

Figure 7.1: Respondents' progression to their current provider



Current participation and progression destinations

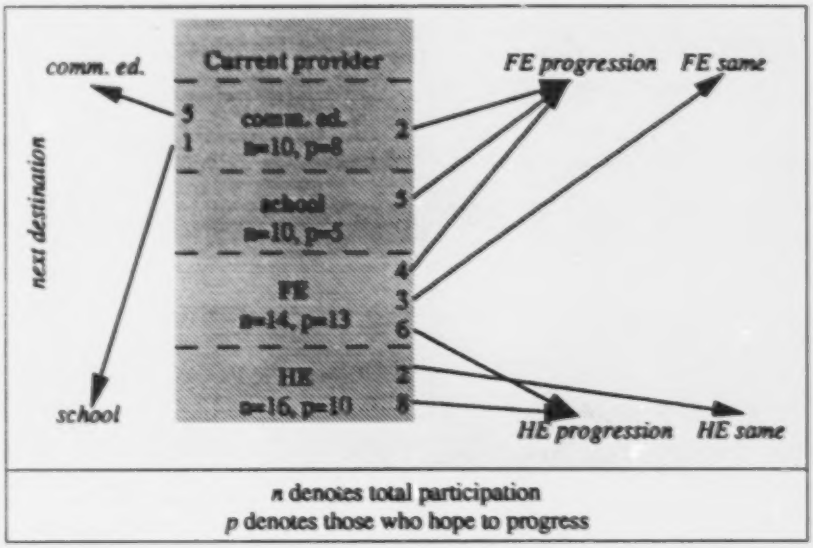
Figure 7.2, showing participants' hoped-for progression destinations, tells a different story. In these cases, where progression was to follow hot on the heels of current participation, much more 'traditional' routes emerge. It is important to keep in mind that this figure really shows three types of progression. The first involves those individuals continuing with the same sorts of courses in the same settings – often at the same provider: this includes adults pursuing different sorts of modules whilst staying in community education (five) and individuals pursuing different (rather than more advanced) modules or degrees in further and higher education (three and two, respectively). The second type of progression involves the pursuing of more advanced courses in the same setting as the current one. This was only happening in providers of further and higher education, where four and eight individuals, respectively, were hoping to go on and do more advanced modules, HNDs or advanced degrees without leaving their current provider. Finally, the third type of progression involved those adults who were seeking to pursue more advanced courses in new settings. This was the single largest group, and included those moving from non-certificated courses in community education to certificated subjects in school or further education; students in school moving to further education; and further education students hoping to continue their studies at degree level at university.

This last group fulfilled our expectations of a 'conventional' progression pattern more than any other. We had expected that individuals choosing to pursue their subject at a more advanced level would wish to do so in a new setting. This was not, however, the only way in which respondents themselves felt they could progress. As the figure shows, progression was in the mind of the beholder: an individual trying different modules in community education was just as likely to perceive this as 'advancing in education' as someone who was seeking an advanced degree in sociology. It is important to remember, too, however, that adults often told us they preferred to stay at their current provider because they were unaware of any other:

> I'm not sure what options are available just now ... I'm actually needing quite a lot more information about what ... kind of courses are available ... I would like somebody to sit down with me and tell me what options are available.

Whilst guidance must take into account that adults do not necessarily see progression as movement onwards and upwards, it must also ensure that adults are fully cognizant of the opportunities available to them.

Figure 7.2: Respondents' next educational destinations



Summary

- *Adults' goals changed over time.* Although adults often returned to education with specific purposes in mind, these tended to evolve or change with participation. Adults who had initially returned without a purpose often found themselves acquiring goals as their courses progressed. These new goals were the result of the gains adults made from their learning.

- *Adults talked about a variety of gains in interview.* The most common gains respondents told us about were increased confidence; enhanced knowledge; improved skills; the motivation to do more; new friends; new interests; increased self-awareness; better sense of self; and employment. These gains resulted in more adults choosing to progress in education than had initially desired to do so.

- *Adults had different reasons for choosing to progress.* From the data, we identified three outcomes leading to progression: higher aspirations arising from increased confidence; unanticipated career plans arising from new interests; and progression 'by accident' arising from enjoyment of participation. We also identified three somewhat more reactive reasons for progression: continuance in education for fear of being unable to find a job; the accumulation

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of qualifications through worry that lack of experience and age will be unattractive to prospective employers; and confusion caused by changing goals and lack of guidance.

- *Progression means different things to different people.* Progression did not always mean an onwards and upwards movement to adult returners. Whilst this was the perception of the single largest group of adults, a number were content to follow similar courses at the same provider for the forseeable future whilst others chose to follow more advanced courses at their current provider. Sometimes this was an informed choice, but a lack of knowledge of guidance opportunities often meant that adults, in effect, had no choice.

8 Policy implications

We began this report by stressing that a wide variety of adults participate in a wide variety of learning opportunities across Scotland. These 50 individual case-studies of adults have sampled only a tiny fraction of these opportunities and have focused on adults participating in what we have called formal learning, that is learning which an adult consciously opts into. Our interest in access and progression lead us to focus upon four common settings in which adults choose to learn: higher education; further education; community based provision organised through the community education service; and schools. This final chapter sums up our main findings and considers the policy implications arising from them. We should stress that our research on 50 adults was intended to explore a range of issues surrounding participation and progression and to add to our understanding of these by encouraging adult students to speak for themselves about their reasons for returning to study, their choice of provider and course, and about their future plans. It is worth re-emphasizing that the small size of the sample and the focus on adults who were participating necessarily limits our discussion of barriers to participation. Commonly-cited barriers, such as lack of child care provision and finance, rarely featured in interview. As mentioned earlier, we cannot generalize from this intensive study of a small number of adult students to the whole population in the conventional statistical sense. We have, however, offered a way of thinking about adult participation which we hope helps to illuminate what a complicated question it is. The policy implications which we identify are necessarily speculative and are offered for discussion and debate. They are drawn directly from the data.

Policy implications

The variety of purposes of participation and the range of circumstances affecting participation which our 50 adults mentioned suggests to us that it is mistaken to look for one single way of encouraging adults to participate. Furthermore, we have seen that adults who participated in education with broadly similar job-related goals in mind enroled in different kinds of courses – full-time, part-time and distance learning – and that these choices could be affected by the same circumstances. For example, financial constraints could encourage one person to opt for a full-time course on the grounds that qualifications and the associated job opportunities were gained more quickly; another person could argue that part-time or distance learning was more appropriate where money was tight, as these forms of study could be combined with employment. This suggests to us that:

- **Categorising adults into particular types and then assuming that certain types will be attracted to particular kinds of provision is unhelpful.**
- **Courses ought to continue to be provided by a range of institutions and in a range of formats, as it is difficult to predict the kinds of institution and modes of provision which will attract particular kinds of adults.**

Perhaps one of our most striking findings was the increasing interest in and commitment to further study once adults experienced success in their courses. This was associated with increased confidence in their own abilities and to some extent reflected the dual purpose of education which has been so much part of the Scottish tradition. Education has traditionally been seen as empowering the people to play their full part in a democratic society. From David Hume's concept of an educated public in the eighteenth century to George Davie's present-day celebration of the democratic intellect, education in Scotland has stressed the personal and social development of the individual as a vital goal. Perhaps, not surprisingly, the more positive experience of education people get, the more they want. The power of education to transform people's concept of themselves in the ways which were reported in Chapter 7 is perhaps one that has been under-emphasised in recent drives for increased participation. Instead, the benefits of education in terms of producing a flexible and adaptable workforce have been highlighted and this has often been translated into education as a means of enhancing career advancement, whether in terms of opening up new job opportunities or of more rapid promotion within the same field. Yet at a time of high unemployment in the British economy, education cannot provide a guaranteed passport to jobs. Many of our respondents realised this and were conscious of the personal and social benefits they had derived from participation. Furthermore, adults could be doing courses labelled vocational for personal rather than job-related reasons, as the adult doing a chemistry degree mentioned in Chapter 2 illustrates. In contrast, adults doing non-certificated courses for recreational reasons often regarded them as the first step, testing the water, before enroling in certificated courses which could enhance their employment prospects. Indeed, by enhancing self-esteem, participation in almost any educational opportunity could give adults sufficient confidence to begin applying for jobs. This difficulty in unambiguously classifying courses as vocational or non-vocational leads us to suggest that:

- **the personal and social benefits of participation should be recognised alongside potential employment benefits;**
- **funding for courses should not be determined by labelling them vocational and non-vocational.**

Once adults have positive experience of returning to education they generally want more. We saw, in Chapter 6, how important a whole range of factors was in sustaining participation. Some of these factors, such as child care provision, good access to library and other facilities, and a general sensitivity to adults' needs on the part of tutors are well documented in the literature. We have also seen that adults progress by a variety of routes. Sometimes these are upwards to a more demanding course at a different institution or within the same institution. Sometimes progression is a sideways move, doing courses at the same level with the same or a different provider. All these kinds of progression are facilitated by collaboration between providers or indeed between departments in the same institution. A client-led system of funding, where funding follows the student may put collaborative arrangements at risk. Institutions and departments, conscious of their status as cost centres and with an eye to their budgets, may be tempted to hang on to students even when this is not in the students' best interests. We gave some examples of this in Chapter 5. This leads us to suggest that:

- **an incentive is offered for effective collaborative arrangements between institutions;**
- **within institutions a formula is devised which does not unduly punish departments where students progress sideways.**

This takes us to a further important issue the need for high quality guidance. The sheer diversity of the opportunities in education now available to adults can be confusing. We saw in Chapter 5 how few adults had sought information and advice about the courses they might take and the institution they might attend. Those adults who had sought information and advice were unsure how to go about it, unaware of the diverse provision available, and often looking for one reference point that was impartial and easily accessible. Community-based provision in general and schools in particular were praised for their recognition that adults needed advice, information and encouragement and for the quality of the service they provided. The case for an independent, client-centred guidance service is highlighted once again. This need is revealed in a plethora of research studies and in recent HMI publications. Such a service is especially important in promoting access to education. Guidance during courses is also important. Policy implications are that:

- **guidance services be co-ordinated at national and regional level and that funding is made available for this purpose;**
- **guidance is given a higher profile in higher education institutions.**

Finally, this research has highlighted the central role which local institutions might play in attracting adult students. Schools, community centres, and colleges can encourage adult participation by making themselves better known in their local communities. For many adults, the local institution is the only one which it is practical for them to attend and even those on distance learning courses welcomed a local source of help and advice with their work. We would suggest that :

- **local institutions saturate their local communities with straightforward information about their existence; stress that they welcome adults of all ages and stages; and take themselves out into the community on outreach work.**

We know that many institutions do this already but it remains a highly necessary strategy given the lack of knowledge about provision which we found among our sample.

As we said at the beginning of this chapter, these policy implications are for discussion and debate. We have deliberately limited their number and concentrated on key issues. Our formulation of a model to understand the rich mix of ingredients which result in adult participation suggests that the wide range of learning opportunities which are now available to adults ought to be encouraged and sustained. We must resist our well known predilection for one national solution to educational problems. A range of opportunities, supported by a co-ordinated and independent guidance service, with all that implies for staff development, and measures to encourage collaboration between institutions and departments should help to encourage wider access and sustain the participation of those adults already in the system.

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Appendix A: Technical appendix

Sampling

In order to draw our sample of 50 participants, we relied heavily upon the co-operation and good will of the providers concerned. It was important that we balance our desire for a random sample with the need to ensure, where possible, a representative spread of participant characteristics. For these reasons, our *selection criteria* in each of the four settings differed. These are outlined in the following section on Data Collection. For all providers, however, our sampling *methodology* was the same.

We contacted, by letter, 15 providers' principals, headteachers and co-ordinators asking them for advice concerning the individuals best able to give us the names and addresses of possible respondents. We then contacted, by 'phone, the heads of department, course lecturers, and tutors suggested to us. After establishing the broad areas in which we were interested, and negotiating any necessary changes in the sampling structure, they in turn provided us with lists of suitable adults who were willing to take part in the research. From these lists, we randomly selected the individuals who were to constitute our final sample. A breakdown of the sample appears in Appendix B.

Data Collection

Data was collected by means of one in-depth interview with each of the 50 adult learners in the sample: in most cases the interview was carried out at the provider, although in several cases it took place in the respondent's home. For reasons of cost and logistics, five interviews took place over the telephone. Each of the interviews was tape-recorded.

Most of the interviews lasted for about 50 minutes. A semi-structured schedule was used to ensure that, while common areas were covered in all the interviews, individual differences could be recorded and explored. Five broad topics were included in the schedule. The first two centred upon the provider and provision chosen by the adults: their reasons for their choice, their knowledge of alternatives; and their opinions about the advantages and disadvantages they had subsequently found. The third section explored respondents' reasons for participation, asking them to describe their goals and say what they felt they had gained through involvement in education. Respondents were also invited to comment on possible progression - their plans for further education or employment after completion of their current course. The guidance section of the interview asked what help or support (both formal and informal) had been received or sought both initially and during the course; how useful it had been; and what possible improvements might be made. The interview closed with a series of questions related to respondents' personal and family circumstances.

Data Analysis

As a first step in analysis, complete transcripts of each of the tape-recorded interviews were prepared. Verbatim transcripts were felt to provide two advantages over structured notes: time-consuming return to the tapes was made unnecessary; and initial analysis might be broadened to include any issues raised by respondents that were not considered in the original schedule.

The next stage of the analysis was the transferral of the transcripts onto pro-formas, or analysis grids. These were devised in order to break down usefully each individual's responses into topics and issues: the headings of the grids related closely to the subjects explored in interview. At this stage, as little editing as possible was done to the transcripts, and these 'long grids' were mostly filled with quotations and (where useful) interviewers' notes.

Whilst this was a useful way of arranging the interview data and guarded against over-simplification at such an early stage in analysis, the lengthiness of some of the quotations made comparison between individuals, provision, and providers difficult. For this reason, a second, highly edited set of 'short girds' was produced, in which key words ('codes') were substituted for the longer responses. These codes arose from thorough examination of the data and much team discussion. They were, importantly, intended to reflect adults' responses rather than force them into pre-determined categories or hypotheses. In this way, we hoped to militate against pre-conceived notions of typology or cause-and-effect.

Most of the counts and comparisons that appear in the body of this report were drawn from the 'short grids' while the quotations, life stories, and other examples were drawn from the 'long grids'.

Settings

Higher Education

We interviewed 16 adults participating in higher education; that is, universities, colleges and institutes of higher education. Participants came from five different institutions. We were most interested in adults following courses of study leading to their first degree or diploma (as opposed to adults involved in continuing education or Access programmes: two examples of these were included in the further education sample). Our second criterion for selection was that respondents must have been aged 25 or more at the start of their course. In this way, we hoped to interview only those individuals who had, at some time since leaving school, had a break from education.

Further education

Fourteen of the adults interviewed were participating in courses at three different colleges of further education. Our first criterion for selection of these respondents was the inclusion of Communications 2 or 3 or Mathematics 2 or 3 as part of their course of study. For this sample, we sought to draw from those individuals who were aged 21 or over at the commencement of their studies.

Community Education

Ten of the adults we interviewed were participating in community education on a part-time or drop-in basis. We did not stipulate an age range for this sample, using instead the criteria that providers themselves employed for identifying 'adult learners'.

Schools

Our final sample consisted of ten adults attending classes in two schools. As with community education, we adopted the providers' own criteria for defining adult learners.

For a more detailed breakdown of the sample, see Appendix B.

Appendix B: The sample

Setting	No. of providers	Participant Characteristics			
		Gender	**Age**	**Provision**	**Course**
Higher education	5	Female 8 Male 8	35-39 5 30-34 4 25-29 3 40-44 2 45+ 2	distance learning 6 full-time 6 part-time 4	Degree (Science) 8 Degree (Arts) 5 Dip. Social Work 3
Further education	3	Female 7 Male 7	30-34 4 20-24 3 25-29 2 40-44 2 45+ 2 35-39 1	full-time 6 part-time 4 distance learning 4	module/s /school subjects 9 SWAP 2 OND 2 job-related course 1
Community education	5	Female 8 Male 2	30-34 5 20-24 2 45+ 2 40-44 1	part-time/drop-in 10	module/s 7 ABE 3
Schools	2	Female 9 Male 1	25-29 4 20-24 2 30-34 2 45+ 2	part-time 9 full-time 1	school sub /modules 5 mixture 3 leisure 1 ABE 1
Total		Female 32 Male 18	30-34 15 25-29 9 45+ 8 20-24 7 35-39 6 40-44 5	part-time 27 full-time 13 distance learning 10	school sub /modules only 21 Degree (Science) 8 Degree (Arts) 5 ABE 4 Dip. Social Work 3 mixture 3 SWAP 2 OND 2 leisure classes 1 job-related course 1

Appendix C: The respondents

Further Education Colleges

FULL TIME

Name: Fiona
Age: 42
Family: Partner, children at school
School qualifications: Highers
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: unemployed
Course: office skills
Initial goal: to find a job

Name: Geoff
Age: 30
Family: Partner, no children
School qualifications: O-grades
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: recently left Air Force
Course: information technology
Initial goal: to find a job

Name: Morag
Age: 22
Family: Single, no children
School qualifications: O-grades
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: various factory jobs
Course: Access to primary education
Initial goal: to progress to teacher train.

Name: George
Age: 39
Family: Partner, children at school
School qualifications: O-grades
Other educational experience: Yes
Employment: lorry driver
Course: ENCON
Initial goal: to find a better job

Name: Peter
Age: 25
Family: Partner, no children
School qualifications: O-grades
Other educational experience? No
Employment: building labourer
Course: OND engineering
Initial goal: to get a better job

Name: Bruce
Age: 50
Family: Partner, children at school
School qualifications: none
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: painter-decorator
Course: Access to primary education
Initial goal: to progress to teacher train.

PART TIME

Name: Dinah
Age: 55
Family: Partner, grown children
School qualifications: lowers
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: disabled
Course: modules and Highers
Initial goal: avoidance

Name: Madge
Age: 31
Family: Divorced, no children
School qualifications: none
Other educational experience: Yes
Employment: unemployed
Course: various modules
Initial goal: to get a job

Name: Mark
Age: 32
Family: Partner, daughter at school
School qualifications: none
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: never worked
Course: various modules
Initial goal: avoidance

Name: Colin
Age: 23
Family: Single, no children
School qualifications: O-grades
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: unemployed
Course: Highers
Initial goal: to get a job

DISTANCE LEARNING

Name: Jean
Age: 24
Family: Partner, pre-school children
School qualifications: none
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: unemployed
Course: various modules
Initial goal: to get a job

Name: Lucy
Age: 33
Family: Partner, children at school
School qualifications: O-grades
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: pt auxiliary nurse
Course: various modules
Initial goal: to progress to nursing coll.

Name: Simon
Age: 27
Family: Partner, pre-school child
School qualifications: O-grades
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: redundant draughtsman
Course: Communications 3
Initial goal: to get a job

Name: Aileen
Age: 43
Family: Partner, grown children
School qualifications: none
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: pt auxiliary nurse
Course: various modules
Initial goal: to progress to nursing coll.

NB: In all cases, 'Family' denotes youngest children

Higher Education

FULL TIME

Name: Nell
Age: 45
Family: Partner, children at school
School qualifications: O-grades
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: at home
Course: Librarianship degree
Initial goal: qualification (personal)

Name: Phil
Age: 29
Family: Single, no children
School qualifications: Highers
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: library assistant
Course: Librarianship degree
Initial goal: to get a better job

Name: Keith
Age: 26
Family: Partner, no children
School qualifications: none
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: oil rig technician
Course: Mechanical engineering degree
Initial goal: to get a better job

Name: Alison
Age: 39
Family: Partner, children at school
School qualifications: none
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: at home
Course: Psychology degree
Initial goal: qualifications (personal)

Name: Jenny
Age: 35
Family: Partner, children at school
School qualifications: Highers
Other educational experience: Yes
Employment: at home
Course: Biology degree
Initial goal: to get a job

Name: Alan
Age: 28
Family: Partner, pre-school children
School qualifications: A-levels
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: Fibre-optic technician
Course: Chemical engineering degree
Initial goal: to get a job

DISTANCE LEARNING

Name: Isabel
Age: 36
Family: Partner, pre-school children
School qualifications: Highers
Other educational experience? No
Employment: at home
Course: BEd
Initial goal: to get a job

Name: Jack
Age: 40
Family: Partner, pre-school children
School qualifications: none
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: residential social worker
Course: Diploma in social work
Initial goal: to get a better job

Name: James
Age: 32
Family: Partner, no children
School qualifications: Highers
Other educational experience: Yes
Employment: personnel/training
Course: Psychology degree
Initial goal: interest

Name: William
Age: 33
Family: Partner, children at school
School qualifications: A-levels
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: systems programmer
Course: Science degree
Initial goal: interest

Name: Archie
Age: 37
Family: Partner, pre-school children
School qualifications: none
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: counsellor
Course: Diploma in social work
Initial goal: to upgrade qualifications

Name: Bernadette
Age: 31
Family: Partner, children at school
School qualifications: O-grades
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: resource centre worker
Course: Diploma in social work
Initial goal: better job

PART TIME

Name: Ellen
Age: 46
Family: Partner, grown children
School qualifications: Highers
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: community worker
Course: Religious studies degree
Initial goal: interest

Name: Margaret
Age: 36
Family: Partner, children at school
School qualifications: Highers
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: laboratory technician
Course: Chemistry degree
Initial goal: qualification (personal)

Name: Dora
Age: 44
Family: Partner, children at school
School qualifications: lowers
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: at home
Course: History degree
Initial goal: self-satisfaction

Name: Paul
Age: 30
Family: Partner, no children
School qualifications: Highers
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: laboratory technician
Course: Chemistry degree
Initial goal: to get a better job

Community Education

ALL PART TIME

Name: Brian
Age: 33
Family: Partner, children at school
School qualifications: none
Other educational experience? No
Employment: poultry worker
Course: Basic literacy
Initial goal: to learn new skills

Name: Jane
Age: 21
Family: Single, no children
School qualifications: none
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: shop assistant
Course: Basic literacy
Initial goal: to learn new skills

Name: Frieda
Age: 32
Family: Partner, children at school
School qualifications: none
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: at home
Course: local history
Initial goal: avoidance

Name: Susan
Age: 65
Family: Single, no children
School qualifications: none
Other educational experience? No
Employment: lollipop lady
Course: local history
Initial goal: Interest

Name: Marion
Age: 44
Family: Partner, pre-school children
School qualifications: none
Other educational experience? No
Employment: at home
Course: modules, incl. word processing
Initial goal: personal satisfaction

Name: Claire
Age: 34
Family: Divorced, pre-school children
School qualifications: O-grades
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: unemployed
Course: drama module
Initial goal: avoidance

Name: Joan
Age: 32
Family: Partner, children at school
School qualifications: none
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: at home
Course: Communications 2
Initial goal: to learn new skills

Name: Tom
Age: 24
Family: Single, no children
School qualifications: none
Other educational experience: Yes
Employment: unemployed
Course: Basic literacy and numeracy
Initial goal: prog. to electronics course

Name: Samantha
Age: 34
Family: Partner, pre-school children
School qualifications: CSEs
Other educational experience: Yes
Employment: at home
Course: modules, incl. Hair & Skin
Initial goal: avoidance

Name: Alice
Age: 46
Family: Partner, grown children
School qualifications: lowers
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: at home
Course: modules, incl. computing
Initial goal: to get a job

Schools

Name: Agnes
Age: 70
Family: Widow, grown children
School qualifications: none
Other educational experience? No
Employment: retired
Course: leisure classes
Initial goal: avoidance

Name: Liz
Age: 33
Family: Partner, pre-school children
School qualifications: O-grades
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: at home
Course: Higher computing
Initial goal: avoidance

Name: Fay
Age: 31
Family: Partner, pre-school children
School qualifications: none
Other educational experience? No
Employment: at home
Course: short courses and leisure
Initial goal: interest

PART TIME

Name: Anne
Age: 25
Family: Single, pre-school children
School qualifications: none
Other educational experience? No
Employment: unemployed
Course: various modules and leisure
Initial goal: avoidance

Name: Graeme
Age: 22
Family: Single, no children
School qualifications: O-grades
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: unemployed
Course: various Standard Grades
Initial goal: to get a better job

Name: Sally
Age: 26
Family: Partner, pre-school children
School qualifications: Highers
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: casual jobs
Course: English & French Highers
Initial goal: progression

Name: Mary
Age: 27
Family: Partner, pre-school child
School qualifications: none
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: at home
Course: modules and leisure classes
Initial goal: avoidance

Name: Christine
Age: 21
Family: Single, pre-school children
School qualifications: none
Other educational experience: No
Employment: never worked
Course: ABE
Initial goal: to get a job

Name: Hilda
Age: 52
Family: Partner, grown children
School qualifications: none
Other educational experience: No
Employment: at home
Course: word processing modules
Initial goal:to get a job

FULL TIME

Name: May
Age: 27
Family: Separated, no children
School qualifications: none
Other educational experience? Yes
Employment: accounts assistant
Course: various Standard Grades
Initial goal: to get a better job

Appendix D: Members of the project advisory committee

Mrs Marian Docherty	HM Inspectorate, SOED
Mrs Judith Duncan	Research and Intelligence Unit, SOED
Dr Alan Brown	Principal, Lauder College
Mr Anthony Cooke	Senior Lecturer in Adult and Continuing Education, University of Dundee
Mr Ian Graham	Principal, John Wheatley College
Ms Maria Walker	Community Education Service, Tayside Regional Council
Ms Margaret Teale	Community Education Service, Lothian Regional Council
Mrs Joyce Connon	Secretary, Scottish National Council, WEA

Further reading

The findings of this study are substantiated by a good deal of previous research into adult education issues. Indeed, there is a surprising degree of consensus in the literature surrounding such disparate topics as participation demographics, policy needs and quality in guidance. Much of this consensus is detailed in the text of this report, as are those areas where we felt our own conclusions departed somewhat from 'conventional wisdom'. A full list of references appears at the end of the report.

Readers wishing to put our findings more firmly in context - or those seeking further information on the key areas of this study - may find the following general works of interest.

The most recent surveys of adult **participation** in education opportunities in the United Kingdom are:

McGivney, Veronica (1990) *Education's For Other People: Access to Education for Non-Participant Adults.* NIACE.

Munn, Pamela and MacDonald, Carolyn (1988) *Adult Participation in Education and Training.* Edinburgh, SCRE.

Sargant, Naomi (1991) *Learning and 'Leisure': A Study of Adult Participation in Learning and its Policy Implications.* NIACE.

Participation theories are put forward and discussed in:

Aslanian, C.B. and Bricknell, H.M.(1980) *Americans in Transition: Life Changes as Reasons for Adults Learning.* New York: College Entrance Examination Board.

Cross, K.P. (1981) *Adults as Learners: Increasing Participation and Facilitating Learning.* San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, Sharan and Caffarella, Rosemary S. (1991) *Learning in Adulthood.* Oxford: Jossey-Bass.

Useful discussions of adult education **research and policy** in the United Kingdom may be found in:

Bown, Lalage (1990) Research and policy in adult education: the state of the art in 1990. *Scottish Journal of Adult Education,* Winter, 9(4), 10-24.

Charnley, Alan (1987) Trends in adult education research, *Adult Education,* March 59(4), 346-352.

For further information on the provision and quality of formal **guidance services** in the United Kingdom, see:

Docherty, Anne (1988) *Local Educational Guidance Services for Adults in Scotland.* SIACE.

Rivis, Vivienne and Sadler, Jackie (1991) *The Quest for Quality in Educational Guidance for Adults.* NIACE.

UDACE (1986) *The Challenge of Change: Developing Educational Guidance for Adults.* UDACE.

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